

Emergency Preparedness

Hurricanes: Be Prepared With Your Respiratory Protection Ahead Of Time

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“Seventeen named storms swirled to life, including 10 hurricanes in a row. There were three Category 4 US landfalls in a period of 26 days: Harvey, Irma and Maria. For context, [prior to those three] the previous three occurred over a period of 56 years.” reported *Ed Rappaport*, acting director of the NOAA, NWS National Hurricane Center in Miami, at the National Hurricane Conference at the Hilton Orlando.

In terms of accumulated cyclone energy, it was the most active season in 167 years. There were five Category 5 landfalls that occurred. US damages reached \$265 billion, surpassing the old record of \$211 billion in 2005.

One of the most damaging storms of the season was Harvey, and it made landfall in Texas in August of 2017. Harvey set a US tropical cyclone rainfall record of 60.58 inches in Texas. Over a span of 25 days, FEMA and its partners deployed tens of thousands of personnel across 270,000 square miles in three different FEMA regions to aid in response and recovery efforts.

Thousands of different types of federal employees were deployed to Texas, Florida, the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, including 13,892 staff from various offices of the Department of Defense, which also involved military services. For the first time, FEMA extended the Department of Homeland Security’s “Surge Capacity Force” to all federal agencies, deploying over 3,800 non-FEMA federal employees.

“This historic hurricane season should serve as a gut check and an opportunity for citizens, businesses, state, local, tribal and federal officials to re-evaluate how we prepare for and respond to any disaster,” said FEMA Administrator Brock Long. “Response and recovery [are] dependent upon the whole community to be successful. While we continue to support the recovery from these storms, we must also take the opportunity to become better prepared for future disasters.”

Weathering the Storm

2017

(06/01/17 - 11/30/17)

USA Hurricane Statistics*



17 named storms



Five category 5 landfalls

226^(ACE)

Most active season in 167 years.

Accumulated cyclone energy

Should only be conducted by workers who have the proper training, equipment and experience.



Search & Rescue



Demo & Cleanup



Utility Restoration

Response & Recovery

Key Hazards



Flood water



Electrical hazards



Unstable buildings



Mold growth



Hazardous materials



Lifting injuries



Working at height hazards



Loud machinery hearing hazards

Common Types of PPE to Help Protect Workers



Head, Eye & Face Protection



Respiratory Protection



Protective Clothing



Hearing Protection



Fall Protection

Sources:

* Ed Rappaport, acting director of the NOAA, NWS, National Hurricane Center in Miami

Meeting Respiratory Protection Needs When A Hurricane Hits

After 2017, you should ask yourself, is your respiratory protection program ready in case a hurricane hits? Do you have the respiratory protection you might need to assist in recovery efforts? One key tip to help answer such questions relates to validating the type, amount, and robustness of your respiratory protection products, as they could be essential to help you and your team be prepared on the respiratory protection front in the event of hurricanes.

Disposable respirators are commonly used to help protect against respiratory hazards after natural disasters, such as hurricanes. To help be prepared, you should inspect your inventory of disposable respirators. For instance, you will want to ensure you have NIOSH approved N95 respirators and not dust masks, which do not provide the type of protection that will be needed if you are exposed to particulate hazards. OSHA requires that respirators be NIOSH approved.

One way to check if you have an N95 respirator is to look for the NIOSH approval label on the package and the respirator. (See our blog to learn more about the *difference between respirators and masks*). Next, you should inspect your current inventory to ensure it is in good condition for use. Are any of your respirators expired? Are the packages damaged and are the respirators inside affected?

Before using any type of respiratory protection, it is important to remember that the wearer must read and understand the User Instructions provided as a part of the product packaging. A written respiratory protection program must also be implemented that meets all the requirements of 29 CFR 1910.134. To learn more about how to implement and manage a program, please see our *Center for Respiratory Protection*.

If you do need to stock up on respirators, this is also a good time to handle any required annual fit testing for your employees. Fit testing is required, so before a disaster is the time to make sure everyone is properly fit tested and that the needed sizes and styles of respiratory protection are on hand.

These are just a few of the things you should keep in mind when looking at *disposable respirator* stockpiles and evaluating whether it is time to make additional purchases. You do not want to be scrambling to stock up after a storm when everyone is looking for respirators to help protect them during the cleanup process or for other tasks.

Beyond Respiratory Protection

Of course, before any hurricane hits, it is also a good time to consider what other types of PPE your team might need in the aftermath, and how much of it. For instance, you might want to consider whether to stock up on eye protection, hearing protection, gloves, coveralls, or other forms of personal protective equipment. It's beneficial to be proactive so you are not scrambling after a storm to stock up when everyone else may also be looking for the same types of protective equipment.

Being prepared for hurricane season should start long before the first storms start to swirl. To learn more or order respirators, please contact us today at 1-800-243-4630 to speak with our technical specialists.

Previously Featured on 3M.com.

For more information on the PPE recommended for storm clean up, please visit 3M's brand landing page on MSCDirect.com.