

HURRICANES 101

By: Chris Floyd
Emergency Services Director
Capital Area Chapter
American Red Cross

Hurricanes are nature's most severe storms. High winds, clouds, and rain move around the calm center, the eye of the hurricane. Next to the eye are the strongest winds, which make up the eye wall. These winds swirl around the eye in a counter-clockwise motion at speeds anywhere from 74 to 200 mph. Hurricane Season runs from June 1- November 30, with August, September and October as the busiest months of the season. In the summer and late fall, the air over the ocean warms up considerably, picks up moisture and begins to move in a circular motion, forming a tropical depression. If the wind speed accelerates above 39 mph, it becomes a tropical storm and is given a name. When the winds reach 74 mph, the storm becomes a hurricane.

A striking hurricane creates four major hazards: storm surge, high winds, tornadoes, and heavy rains...

- Storm surge is a rise in the sea level caused by strong winds. It effects both coastal and inland areas.
- High winds from 74 to 200 mph, take down trees, houses and anything else in the storm's path.
- Tornadoes are often spawned by hurricanes. If this occurs, seek shelter immediately in an interior bathroom or small hall, preferably below ground level.
- Flooding caused by the torrential rains can occur in both coastal and inland areas. Residents of storm-prone areas should purchase flood insurance (which is not provided for in a homeowner's policy).

A ***hurricane watch*** is issued when a hurricane or hurricane conditions pose a threat to coastal areas, generally within 36 hours. Everyone in the area covered by the watch should listen for further advisories and be prepared to act promptly if a hurricane warning or evacuation is issued.

A ***hurricane warning*** is issued when hurricane winds of 74 mph or higher, or a combination of dangerously high water and very rough seas, are expected in a specific coastal area within 24 hours. When a hurricane warning is issued, all precautions should be completed immediately. If the hurricane's path is unusual

or erratic, the warning may be issued only a few hours before the beginning of hurricane conditions.

Stay informed of atmospheric behavior by listening to NOAA Weather Radio. NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts National Weather Service warnings, watches, forecasts and other hazard information 24 hours a day. It is provided as a public service by the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The NOAA Weather Radio Network has more than 425 stations in the 50 states and near adjacent coastal waters. Weather service personnel use information from Doppler radar, storm spotters, state and local officials, satellites and other sources to issue warnings. These watches and warning are broadcast over local NOAA Weather Radio stations and also are retransmitted by many local radio and television stations. With this information, local emergency management and public safety officials can activate local warning systems to alert communities of an impending weather threat.