

Tips for River Bluffs Residents on Hurricane Preparation and Restoration

From the River Bluffs Core Advisory and Community Watch Committees

In September 2018, the Cape Fear was “ground zero” for the landfall of Hurricane Florence. It was a tremendously strong natural disaster that impacted our region for months and caused record-setting property losses throughout southeastern North Carolina.

As individuals and as a community, River Bluffs anticipated and survived the storm without catastrophic damage. This was a result of good planning and good luck. We have learned from this difficult experience and many of these lessons have been collected in this document. We offer them to help you prepare for future hurricanes and severe storms, which unfortunately are a fact of life in this part of the country.

Our guidance is broken down into individual and community-wide efforts. But please understand that residents are primarily responsible for their own preparation, decisions, and actions. River Bluffs Management (RBM) will do what they can to help the community prepare and mitigate storm damage, but these efforts cannot take the place of each homeowner’s preparation and decisions.

Individual Preparation

- Evaluate your home insurance policies to ensure that you have adequate financial recourse in the event of wind, hail, tree, rain, and/or ground water damage.
- Find a good hurricane preparation checklist (start with the American Red Cross website) and prepare a good supply kit. Don’t wait until a storm is off the coast to start preparing or you’ll find that many supplies are already gone from the stores.
- Consider purchasing a portable or whole-house generator. Understand which appliances you can run on the generator. If you opt for a portable generator, be sure to know how to work it safely and test it before using in an emergency. Also, stock up on generator fuel well in advance of the storm.
- Do a walk-around of your property and determine whether any of your trees need trimming or removal prior to a storm. Also check for roof, gutter or window flaws that may turn into big problems with serious wind and/or rainfall. If possible, clean your gutters. Now is the time to address any tree issues!

- In addition to obvious supplies (drinking water, non-refrigerated foods, medical supplies, trash bags, first-aid kit, flashlights, and batteries, etc.), consider what you will need for emergency damage to your home, such as painter's plastic sheets, duct tape, plastic buckets, brooms, and rags.
- Refill any prescriptions you may have regardless of how much is left.
- Do a walk-through of your house and take pictures of each room for inventory reasons. At the same time, move fragile items, pictures, and your special keepsakes to a sheltered closet or storage room.
- Ensure you have outdoor clothing and gear if you must brave the weather to unclog drains or roof gutters. Such things as sturdy gloves, rubber boots, and water-resistant clothing will come in handy. Also, be sure to have a rake or shovel to handle lawn or drainage problems.
- Stock up on cash before the storm. When the electricity cuts out, banks and ATMs will shut down and businesses that stay open may resort to "cash only" sales.
- Move all lawn ornaments, hoses, bird houses, flowerpots, trashcans, and exterior furniture to a sheltered place, like a garage. Remove and store the cover of your backflow system. Turn off your sprinkler system. Also consider taping up your exterior electrical outlet covers – if they blow open, water could short-circuit your electrical system.
- If your generator may not completely power your refrigerator and freezer, consume or throw away all perishable food in time for the last pre-storm trash pickup. Wasting food is better than dealing with spoiled food, especially given the time it might take for post-storm trash pickup. Another reminder is to shut off your icemaker and empty the ice storage receptacle to avoid leakage from melted ice.
- Save as much drinking water as you can before the storm. Sterilize and fill tubs, sinks, and empty jugs or coolers.
- Have strong surge protectors for sensitive appliances or unplug them before the storm to avoid damage from lightning strikes or power surges.

- Download a local news app and/or “ReadyNC” on your cell phone for easy access to emergency information. Be sure to have at least one battery-operated radio available to monitor the news.

“Should I Stay or Should I Go”

When a storm approaches, one of the hardest decisions is whether to remain at home or evacuate the area. Understand that this is a personal decision, and you alone should determine the best action for your household. There is no guilt or shame in leaving your neighborhood if that is the best thing for you to do.

If you LEAVE:

- Have a confirmed destination in mind – such as a reserved hotel room. This is especially true when traveling with pets, as many hotels will not accept animals, even during evacuations.
- Be sure your neighbors and relatives know of your decision to leave and your destination. If possible, let them know when you arrive.
- Be sure to have a full tank of gas when you set out. Heavy traffic or backups will cause you to use more gasoline than expected. Anticipate that gas stations along major routes may run out of fuel and stations that are open may ration the supply. They may also require cash sales.
- If you leave, do so well before the storm arrives. Even major roads can flood quickly in a hurricane or tropical storm and emergency responders may be unavailable to rescue you in a crisis.
- If your garage has extra space (which it might once you remove your car), consider offering it to neighbors for their temporary use.
- If you leave at the last minute and your home is stocked with food and water, consider giving your neighbors access (via key and/or pin code) in case they have emergency needs. (This generous planning helped several residents through Florence’s long duration.)

- Lightning or power surges can set off your home alarm. If you set the alarm on your house before you leave, let your neighbor know and leave instructions on how they can disarm it.
- Anticipate damaged roads and the priority given to emergency responders, may keep you from returning for a week or more. Remember to take your laptop with you and make sure your “go kit” has the important documents you’ll need to tide you over. This includes insurance information, personal identification papers, checks, and cash.
- In case of an extended power outage and absence, empty your refrigerator and freezer of perishables. No one wants to arrive home to a refrigerator full of spoiled food.

If you STAY:

- Even if you do not plan to leave during the storm, consider where you could shelter if you face serious damage to your home. If possible, work out an arrangement with a neighbor to shelter with them in the event of an emergency.
- Determine which of your neighbors are also staying and help them prepare for the storm’s impact. Stay in contact with them (if possible) during and after the storm.
- Be alert to streaming and standing water around your home and lawn, especially in low-lying areas. Be prepared to clear storm drains and key drainage points around your house (when safe to do so).
- Continuously monitor news and storm updates. Avoid venturing outside unless necessary to mitigate damage or enhance your safety.
- Understand that Chair Road will likely be cut off in the event of severe weather. That means access to/exit from River Bluffs may not be possible during and immediately after the storm.
- If Chair Road out to Castle Hayne Road is impassable, and if appropriate, RBM will open the RB back gate to the Sunset Reach subdivision. With access to Rockhill Road to Castle Hayne Road, this could be an alternate route out of the community. The gate is located near the marina at the intersection of Chair Road and Sabal Pond Way. Please be aware that a section of Rock Hill Road just past Route 140

flooded during Hurricane Florence and may become impassable, Information on when and how to access the exit will be conveyed to residents during the pre-storm meeting or via post-storm communications.

- Realize that when the power is out, the front gates will be in the “open” position until power is restored. This means that non-residents might enter the community uninvited. Residents should stay vigilant and keep homes and cars locked. If you notice suspicious activities, call 911 for help.
- Avoid going near the river or any body of water that is impacted by excessive rainfall or groundwater. This includes the Riverwalk and areas around the boat ramp. Flash flooding is probable during and especially AFTER the storm passes. This can occur even days after the main event.
- Prior to any serious storm, RBM will remove any drain keepers. If possible, SAFE and reasonable, please keep try and keep the storm drains near your home clear of debris. Although the property drains extremely well, a clogged storm drain could cause a localized problem.
- While it’s reasonable to assess damage to your home and attempt to mitigate any serious damage, you should avoid dangerous activities (i.e., cutting downed trees, repairing a damaged roof, lifting heavy objects) until you are sure that emergency personnel can access the community in case of an accident or medical incident.
- After the storm, check on your neighbors. Consider volunteering in support of community efforts (i.e., damage assessments, enabling emergency access, medical assistance, sharing meals and supplies). If you have special skills, such as handling a backhoe, tractor, or chainsaw, or medical training, let others know that you are willing to help.
- After the storm RBM and the RB HOA will coordinate storm yard debris removal. Place the debris on the lawn in front of your home. **DO NOT PLACE IN THE STREET** as this may impede recovery and emergency vehicles.

River Bluffs Management Preparations

- At the beginning of hurricane season, River Bluffs Management (RBM) assesses trees and plants in the community areas to identify and resolve any problem

vegetation that storms might aggravate. RBM may offer residents access to the same tree services they use (at the resident's expense).

- RBM will attempt to stay informed of the forecasts of any major weather event. If practical, they will hold a community-wide meeting with residents in advance of the storm to address concerns and explain likely pre- and post-storm responses.
- Note that RBM personnel will not be available for assistance during or immediately after the emergency, as they are not emergency responders and may not have access to the community. That is why pre-storm planning and post-storm communications are important to the community's response and recovery efforts.
- RBM will consider pre-staging some emergency equipment (e.g., shovels, rakes, saws, tarps, duct tape) to help residents undertake community efforts to clear roads and drainage areas. Note that if provided, this equipment will be designated for community needs and emergency use.
- RBM may help provide emergency equipment to those residents who volunteer to be neighborhood "captains." For example, RBM may provide captains with two-way radios, a defibrillator, first-aid kit, access to staged equipment, or other emergency equipment for the benefit of the community. This responsibility will only be placed on the residents who volunteer for this type of duty.
- RBM reminds all boat owners that their boats and equipment must be removed from the marina before the storm. Also, those with property in the RV/Boat storage lot must ensure their property is safely secured and does not pose a danger to surrounding property.

River Bluffs Management Preparations – General Store

Once hurricane or other storm-related preparedness becomes necessary, the General Store at River Bluffs will take necessary measures to secure the premises both outside and inside the store. While the store will not be accessible during the emergency, it may be available for use as a relief center following the emergency once the store has been assessed for damage to both structure and contents.

Immediately following the emergency, if the building structure is safe, store management will assess the store's inventory and utilities per The General Store's Emergency Action Plan (outlined by the county health department) to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements and to assure all food items may be safely used (either sold or donated to the community) or properly disposed.

Once store management along with RBM determines that the store may serve as an emergency relief center, the facility will be open to provide an onsite facility so that residents can meet, organize, plan, and share resources during recovery efforts.

During the post-storm recovery and beyond the facility use, the General Store will look to provide the following, if possible:

- **Food preparation:** Food preparation within the store will not be possible due to lack of equipment. However, store personnel will aid in the coordination and preparation of any “cook-out” style meals that can be organized among residents using the outdoor grill(s) and patio area, if structurally possible.

Note: If the store has perishable foods that remain safe for consumption; however, will need to be cooked or consumed quickly, will offer such foods for preparation to feed residents during the post-storm recovery.

- **Ice:** If potable water supply and generator power is available, the store will produce bagged ice and make it available to residents upon request.
- **Restrooms:** If plumbing/sewer infrastructure is suitable, the restrooms within the store will be open for resident use.
- **Water:** Available bottled water inventory will be made available to residents, with priority to those volunteers working on post-storm recovery projects.
- **Communication:** If infrastructure permits, free wi-fi connection will be available. Charging stations for cells phones, weather radios, and computers will be set up.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guidance. Some additional guidance on hurricane preparedness can be found on the RB portal, in the Community Watch library.

And, if you have any suggestions for additional guidance or “best practices” in this area, please contact a Core Advisory or Community Watch Committee member. We will try to update this document annually and will incorporate good ideas as they are received.