

Tips for River Bluffs Residents on Hurricane Preparation and Restoration

**From the Core Advisory Committee and
Community Watch Committee**

In September 2018, the Cape Fear region was “ground zero” for the landfall of Hurricane Florence. It was an unusually 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 result was due to both good planning and good fortune (for most of us). But we learned from this difficult experience and some of our new-found wisdom is contained in this document. We offer this advice to help you prepare for future hurricanes and severe storms, which unfortunately are a fact of life in this part of the country. Preparation can make a big difference in the storm’s impact on you.

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 will do what they can to help the community anticipate and mitigate storm damage, but their efforts cannot take the place of each homeowner’s preparation, decisions and recovery efforts.

Individual Preparation

- Evaluate your 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 -- 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 safely 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 could turn into a major problem with high winds and/or rainfall.
- 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, fans, extension cords, brooms and rags.

- Refill any prescriptions you have, regardless of how many pills are left.
- Do a walk-through of your house and take pictures of each room for inventory reasons. As the storm nears, move fragile items, pictures, and your special keepsakes to a sheltered closet or storage room. Store these above the floor.
- Ensure you have appropriate outdoor gear if you must brave the weather to unclog drains or roof gutters. Such things as study gloves, rubber boots, goggles or heavy glasses 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 lanai or 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 home’s electrical system.
- If your generator may not completely power your refrigerator and freezer, consume or throw away all perishable food before the last trash pickup. Wasting food is better than dealing with spoiled food, especially considering it may take a long time for the 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 plastic water jugs or coolers.
- Have strong surge protectors for sensitive appliances or unplug them before the storm to avoid damage from lightning strikes or strong 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 safely.
 - 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. As the storm nears, emergency responders may be unavailable to rescue you on the road.
 - 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 already stocked with food and water, consider giving your neighbors access (via key and/or pin code) in case they have emergency needs. This generosity and good 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 that 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, checks, and cash.
- If you STAY:
 - Even if you do not plan to leave during the storm, consider where you could shelter if your home becomes seriously damaged or flooded. If possible, work out an arrangement to shelter with a neighbor in an emergency. Note that local shelters may be impossible to reach during the 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 a severe storm. That means access to and from River Bluffs may not be possible during and immediately after the storm.
- 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 could enter the community uninvited. Residents should stay vigilant and keep homes and cars locked. If you notice suspicious activities, call 911.
- 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 passes us.
- While it’s reasonable to assess damage to your home and attempt to mitigate it, you should avoid dangerous activities (i.e., cutting downed trees, repairing a damaged roof, lifting heavy objects by yourself) until you are sure that emergency personnel can access the community in case of an accident or medical crisis.
- After the storm, check on your neighbors. Consider volunteering for community-wide recovery 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 if needed.

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 resident 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 defibrator, first-aid kits, or access to staged emergency equipment for the benefit of the community. This responsibility will only be given to residents who volunteer for this type of duty.
- RBM is exploring options for a second, emergency exit from RB in the event Chair Road is closed. The most likely option is through access to Rock Hill Road, which is not currently a viable exit. If a new exit is designated for emergency purposes, information on when and how to access it will be conveyed to residents during the pre-storm meeting or via post-storm communications.
- 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.
- After Florence, special efforts were taken to close Porches café as a restaurant and reopen it for community needs. The facility may or may not be available for emergency use as a relief center during the next storm, but RBM is aware of the importance of a temporary meeting place for residents. To this end, they will try to make an on-site facility available so that residents can meet, organize, plan and share resources during recovery efforts.

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

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