

Hurricane Preparedness is a Year-Round Effort

Commissioner Maria Marino

The six-month Atlantic hurricane season commences June 1 and runs through November 30. Most of us have that etched in our brains, but for the more than 500,000 estimated new residents who moved to Florida in 2022, and others that have made Palm Beach County their home in recent years, that may come as a bit of a shock.

However, as we long-time residents and hurricane “veterans” know, there are emergency management systems in place and specific guidelines to help all of us stay prepared, supplied and ready, should a storm approach our shores. It is also incumbent upon all of us to reach out and help people unfamiliar with hurricane season and those who are elderly, disabled or have restricted mobility.

At the Governor’s Hurricane Conference I attended recently in West Palm Beach, officials from the National Hurricane Center stressed that while wind velocity is a concern in a hurricane event, storm surge poses a greater threat. That is why we must follow mandatory evacuation orders when declared, depending on which zone covers your neighborhood.

The information you need to build a complete hurricane kit is available at <https://discover.pbcgov.org/publicsafety/PDF/Hurricane-Guide.pdf>. If you do not have internet access or need additional information, contact the Emergency Information Center at (561) 712-6400. Along with checklists for supplies, evacuation zone maps, and numerous helpful tips, the guide also includes transportation and shelter information, and suggested steps to take in securing your home.

Florida’s Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis recently announced the renewal of the My Safe Florida Home Program, which is offering grants of up to \$10,000 to help homeowners pay for hurricane-hardening improvements such as impact-resistant windows and doors. Purchases of these products are tax free through June 30, 2024. In addition, upon completion of the improvements, a homeowner can request a free windstorm mitigation inspection and report that they can submit to their insurance carrier for a rebate or discount on rates. Find out more at [My Safe Florida Home – Florida Department of Financial Services \(mysafehome.com\)](https://mysafehome.com).

One of the most helpful year-round practices you can develop to help you safeguard your property is the regular maintenance and pruning of your landscaping and trees. Depending on whether you live in the unincorporated area or in a municipality, there may be specific limits on the amount of yard debris you can place at the curb for pick up. In the unincorporated area, it is limited to six cubic yards per collection day, which is roughly the size of two refrigerators. Cities have their own guidelines, so you will want to confirm what they allow.

Before the Solid Waste Authority (SWA) instituted vegetation restrictions in 2019, neighborhoods, especially those with parcels of an acre or larger experienced negative effects

resulting from large piles of vegetation and tree trimmings blocking entire swales. This impeded storm water drainage, blocked the line of sight for drivers, and attracted vermin.

Whether you perform the pruning yourself or hire a contractor, make sure that your pile does not block the sidewalk, the street, or other areas of ingress and egress. If you need to place more than the allowable amount at the street and have no other means of clearing it away, the SWA can work with you to arrange a separate pickup at a cost of \$8 per square yard. You can contact SWA Customer Service at (561) 697-2700; (866) 792-4636, or by emailing contactCIS@swa.org.

To help you stay prepared during hurricane season and for questions on any other matters, please contact me at (561) 355-2201 or by email at mmarino@pbcgov.org.