



# TEXAS ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES RISK MANAGEMENT POOL

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## **Is Your County Prepared for Hurricane Season?**

September not only brings the start of school, fall, and football but also the peak of hurricane season. The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 through Nov. 30 each year and anyone within 100 miles of the Texas coast should be reviewing their plans and preparing for any storm that may come their way.

Hurricanes bring a variety of weather issues that can severely affect counties and their operations. These named storms can include wind, rain, tornadoes and flooding. As Hurricane Harvey demonstrated in 2017, all four issues affect a wide area in southeast Texas. Prepare for these storms by reviewing your emergency plans and ensuring procedures are in place to protect employees, property, vehicles and other county infrastructure. Counties should also be prepared to provide support to residents affected by the storms.

### **The calm before the storm**

Preparing for the next storm shouldn't take place when you hear on the news that a storm is approaching. The emergency planning process is a year-round process that can help prepare the county for various weather and non-weather emergencies. Emergency response staff are monitoring weather and other weather-related resources like the National Weather Service (NWS) and National Hurricane Center for up-to-date information on impending events.

It is important to understand and recognize weather terminology used to describe events, such as alerts, watches and warnings. Each has a distinct meaning that requires different actions and communication to staff and residents. These warnings can also affect operations and activities, especially outdoor activities that may need to be changed or cancelled. Knowing the difference can help in responding to changing weather conditions as well as monitoring of roads, facilities and other high risk areas affected by severe weather. Know your flood risks, have a response plan and work on mitigating flood-related risks.

Power outages are also a given during many weather or disaster events. Procedures for food storage and handling for food service operations should be reviewed. This should also include processes for the handling of perishables (food, medical, etc.) throughout the county to ensure safety of county services recipients.

Counties are also front and center when disasters strike and the effects from any disaster will have an impact on the limited resources of your organization. It is important to consider the potential costs, impact on resources and available coverage for losses that may occur to emergency response and overall operations and services.

While setting up Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Interlocal Agreements (ILAs) prior to emergencies is preferred, county resources will probably be shared with other local and state jurisdictions regardless of the existence of any agreements. Officials should keep detailed documentation of assistance and resources provided before, during and after a weather event or other emergency.

Vast resources are available to assist counties after a major weather disaster. However, there are procedures that must be followed in order to receive assistance from state and federal resources. County personnel should be fully prepared and understand the processes for requesting assistance.

Planning should also include preparing for how to reconstitute essential county operations after an event. At a minimum, identify essential personnel, space requirements, communications, computer and data resources, and transportation ahead of time. Additional considerations should include planning to eventually resume full operations.

### **After the storm**

The real work begins once the storm has passed. First and foremost is to establish a safe environment to initiate recovery efforts. These are some of the steps that can be taken:

- Secure locations and protect any impacted property against further damage.
- Cover buildings and exposed property; board up broken windows, holes in walls, roof leaks, and areas exposed to damage.
- Assess and document damage to facilities, vehicles, equipment and any other losses that can be attributed to the event; document, when possible, using photos.
- Keep records of expenditures for emergency repairs; reimbursement may require that you submit receipts.
- Building infrastructure should be inspected if affected by a severe weather event prior to resuming use. This should cover all building systems including electrical, water, HVAC, and boilers; any obvious problems and any special equipment or personnel needed to facilitate repairs should be noted. Personnel performing these inspections should be trained on proper safety procedures. Special considerations should be made for flood waters because these can contain hazardous chemicals and bacteria.
- After major disasters, there is an outpouring of volunteers and donations to assist the recovery efforts and plans are needed to manage this assistance.
- Contact the TAC Risk Management Pool (TAC RMP) or your Auto, Liability, and Property coverage providers if you experience damage from a weather event or hurricane.

TAC RMP members have access to resources and consultants to assist with planning and maintaining a safe environment. Staff is also available to assist with the claims process if you need to file a claim. Please contact us at (800) 456-5974 for Risk Control Services and Claims Assistance.

**TAC RMP 24/7 Claims Hotline: (855) 47CLAIM or (855) 472-5246**