Hurricane season for the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico region begins June 1 and ends November 30. Hurricane researchers are predicting an above-average Atlantic hurricane season in 2020, citing the likely absence of El Niño as a primary factor. Tropical and subtropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures are currently warmer than their long-term average values and are consequently also considered a factor favoring an active 2020 Atlantic hurricane season.

Now is also the time to go over your disaster plan with your family. Make sure you know your evacuation route should you plan to leave the area; and provide a neighbor/friend with your contact information should you leave.

The City of Fort Walton Beach encourages all residents to be safe before, during and after a storm. Inside this newsletter you will find more helpful tips and information for this hurricane season.

**DISASTER SUPPLY KIT**

At the start of hurricane season, it is important to assemble a disaster supply kit. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy to carry containers. Keep important documents in a waterproof container. A disaster supply kit should include the following:

- At least a 3-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day).
- Food that won’t spoil/can opener.
- One change of clothing and shoes per person per day.
- One blanket or sleeping bag per person and pillow.
- First-aid kit with bandages, antiseptic wipes, antibacterial ointment, tweezers, adhesive tape, etc.
- Prescriptions.
- Battery-powered portable radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- Emergency tools.
- Phone and extra batteries/charger.
- Credit Card and cash.
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- Personal hygiene supplies and sunscreen.
- Other items needed on daily basis.
Fort Walton Beach residents, business owners, and visitors are strongly encouraged to enroll in Alert Okaloosa, a notification system used to alert residents about weather emergencies and actions to take. (Alert Okaloosa is replacing the county’s Code Red system.)

Alert Okaloosa, which is operated by the Okaloosa Department of Emergency Management, will notify residents in area where severe weather is predicted, to let them know ahead of time of tornadoes, flash flooding, or other threats.

Understanding the following terms may be helpful as you listen to weather information on your radio or television before and during a storm.

**Tropical Depression** An organized system of persistent clouds and thunderstorms with a closed low-level circulation and maximum sustained winds of 38 mph or less.

**Tropical Storm** An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a well defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39 - 73 mph.

**Hurricane** An intense tropical weather system with a well defined circulation and sustained winds of 74 mph or higher.

Other terms important to know to help identify a hurricane hazard include:

**Storm Surge** A dome of water pushed onshore by hurricane and tropical storm winds. Storm surges can reach 25 feet high and be 50 - 100 miles wide.

**Storm Tide** A combination of storm surge and the normal tide (i.e. a 15-foot storm surge combined with a 2-foot normal high tide over the mean sea level creates a 17-foot storm tide).

**Hurricane/Tropical Storm Watch** Hurricane/tropical storm conditions are possible in the specified area, usually within 36 hours.

**Hurricane/Tropical Storm Warning** Hurricane/tropical storm conditions are expected in the specified area, usually within 24 hours.

**Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale** Hurricanes are classified into five categories based on their wind speed, central pressure, and damage potential. Category 3 and higher hurricanes are considered major hurricanes, although Category 1 and 2 storms are still extremely dangerous and warrant our residents’ full attention.

In the aftermath of a hurricane or tropical storm, there is one thing we can count on - debris that needs to be cleaned up and hauled away. **Ordinance 10.80.06** states that no resident, contractor or business shall cut, trim or remove trees once the City of Fort Walton Beach has been placed under a Tropical Storm Watch or Hurricane Watch/Warning. Loose tree limbs can clog storm drains and become wind borne debris. General guidelines for separating storm debris: 1) Make two separate piles - one for vegetation (tree trunks, branches) and one for construction debris (shingles, lumber, etc.). Place the separate piles in the public right-of-way next to the street in front of your property. Only storm debris in the right-of-way will be collected. Debris should never be placed in the street and should be kept away from fire hydrants, manholes, storm drains, mail boxes, utility meters, etc. 2) Debris collection and disposal covered by property insurance is not eligible and should not be placed in the right-of-way for collection. 3) Commercial entities and residents of private roads must make their own arrangements for debris removal.

**STORM TERMS FOR HURRICANE SEASON**

**Alert Okaloosa Notification System**

Fort Walton Beach residents, business owners, and visitors are strongly encouraged to enroll in Alert Okaloosa, a notification system used to alert residents about weather emergencies and actions to take. (Alert Okaloosa is replacing the county’s Code Red system.)

Notifications are sent through the channels preferred by the user, and can be sent via:
- Email
- Business Phone
- Home Phone
- Cell phone (text)
- Cell phone (automated call)

To ensure that the system will notify you when you or your business are threatened by severe weather or other public safety emergency, please register your address and preferred contact information into the Alert Okaloosa county portal. Sign up here: http://www.co.okaloosa.fl.us/ps/alert
GASOLINE SAFETY

Many residents stock up on gasoline during the summer months due to lawn care and hurricane season. The Fort Walton Beach Fire Department would like to provide these helpful hints for gasoline storage. Improper storage and handling of flammable liquids (most commonly gasoline) can be ignited by smoking materials, electrical spark, or appliance pilot lights. The following actions can prevent the build-up of unseen gasoline vapors.

When storing gas at home, be sure to use approved “UL” listed safety containers. Never use a glass jug, discarded bleach bottle or other non-conforming container.

Store the fuel in a well ventilated area where tipping over or accidental damage is unlikely to occur.

Do not store flammable liquids in the same room as household heating equipment. Home utility rooms can be unsafe because a pilot light or sparking switch can set off an explosion of unseen vapors. Many local regulations prohibit the storage of large amounts of flammable liquids in inhabited buildings.

Carrying an extra supply of gasoline in the car is not recommended. This practice enhances the likelihood of injury from explosion. However, if gasoline must be carried in your vehicle store it in a heavy, unvented can. A container must have vapor tight seals on the cap of the fill opening and the pouring spout.

Leave room in the container for gas to expand as it is warmed by the heat of the day or heat of the car.

Securely anchor the can to prevent damage in the event of an accident or sudden stop. And of course, do not smoke.

Remember, always keep cigarettes, lighters, matches and small children away from gasoline. When refilling yard equipment, do so in a well vented area, and allow the engine to cool before pouring in the gas.

INSURANCE TIPS AND INFORMATION

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers these tips for filing insurance claims:

When you call your insurance agent to make a claim, have your policy number and an address and telephone number where you can be reached.

During the call, ask when an adjuster can be expected to visit your property. The adjuster will work with you to calculate your losses and prepare a settlement estimate. If you do not hear from the adjuster within a week of the expected time, contact your agent again.

Evidence of your loss will be important in reaching an estimate. Photographs and videotape of the property showing damage are valuable. Make a list of your damaged property including age and value. Show adjuster any repair estimates you have received from contractors or technicians.

Contact FEMA at 800-621-3362, or www.fema.gov to register for disaster assistance.
In a major disaster, emergency workers may not be able to reach everyone right away, and in some cases it may take three or more days for help to arrive. What would you do if you had no electricity, no gas, no water and no telephone service? Having a plan for your family and their needs will help ensure their safety and comfort during these difficult times.

That’s why citizens are encouraged to create a disaster plan in the event our area is struck by a storm. One way to do this is through the Florida Division of Emergency Management’s website, www.Floridadisaster.org.

This website provides residents with information and help on developing a family plan, a business plan, a kids plan and strengthening your home. There is also information for disabled residents.

Get your plan together today. Remember, it is always better to plan before a disaster strikes.
When a hurricane hits our area, power may be lost. Depending on the severity of a storm, it can take a few days to several weeks to restore power to all customers. During this time, please stay away from all downed power lines, and treat all lines as if they are active. If a power line is down near you, stand still, warn others to stay back and call Gulf Power immediately. This is important because of the hazards of Step Potential. If you’re caught in the energy field of a downed line, and step away, on foot may be in a 7,000 volt area and the other is in a 6,000 volt area. The difference that will pass through you is 1,000 volts. Also, do not connect portable generators to your household electrical wiring. Rather, plug appliances into the generator. By backfeeding power through your house, you endanger power crews working to restore power in your neighborhood. Turn off large appliances and air conditioners and wait 10 to 15 minutes after power has been restored before turning them back on.

Most coastal residents are fully aware of Hurricane season (June 1-November 30) and the issues storm surges can cause.

What some residents might not think about, however, are what stormwater mechanisms are in place to remove the flood waters during and after these and other storm events.

The City of Fort Walton Beach currently has approximately 34 miles of underground stormwater pipe, 61 outfalls (end of pipe meeting open body of water), 11 stormwater retention ponds, 3 miles of ditches and streams, and over 1300 curb and surface inlets.

The City maintains this infrastructure by cleaning ditch lines, inspecting stormwater infrastructure, mapping infrastructure, rehabbing and replacing outdated pipes, designing and planning upgrades, and removing debris.

The general public can help the City keep the stormwater system clean and ready for the next big rain event, and also keep area waterways clean, by keeping these items out of stormwater infrastructure:

**Motor oil** – 5 quarts of motor oil can create an oil slick two football fields in size. Keep your car tuned up & repair leaks. Do not store these items in low lying areas.

**Household hazardous waste** (antifreeze, batteries, paint, cleaners, etc) – dispose of properly or recycle at designated centers. Do not pour these items down a stormwater inlet.

**Sediment** – suffocates and kills oysters, submerged vegetation, and clogs stormwater pipes. Oysters and submerged vegetation filter local waterways to help keep them clean.

**Trash** – clutters our beaches, clogs pipes, and could be mistaken for food by marine mammals and sea turtles.

**Leaves** – create a compost pile with yard clippings & kitchen scraps. Do not put leaves in ditches or storm drains. Place the leaves in yard debris bags and put them on the curb for pickup. Do not put loose leaves on the curb.

**Pet waste** – picking up after your pet will help reduce bacterial & nutrient pollution during rain events.

These items can pollute the water, clog the storm drain systems and lead to flooding, especially during extreme rain events such as a hurricane.

Eliminating items other than stormwater from the storm drain systems also reduces operating & maintenance cost.

By keeping these items out of the storm drain system & ditches we will work together in improving our water quality, and ensure floodwaters subside by only allowing stormwater to become discharged into our local waters.

This is one of many steps needed to ensure the health and safety for future generations!

Remember: Only rain down the drain!