

...NORTH CAROLINA HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS WEEK...

This week has been declared North Carolina's Hurricane Preparedness Week for 2010. All week long the National Weather Service will issue informative messages to help you prepare for hurricane season.

Each day we will cover a different topic. Today we will talk about high winds.

Starting this year the National Hurricane Center will use a redefined Saffir-Simpson scale for classifying hurricanes solely on the storm's wind speed. The updated scale provides more description to the type of damage expected to various structures based on wind engineering. To learn more about this updated Saffir-Simpson Scale visit <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/sshws.shtml>.

The intensity of a land falling hurricane is expressed in terms of categories that relate to wind speeds and potential damage. A Category One hurricane, on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale, has lighter winds when compared to higher category hurricanes. A Category Four hurricane...like Hurricanes Hazel and Hugo...contains winds between 131-155 mph, and would be expected to cause 100 times more damage than a category 1 hurricane.

Even tropical storm force winds of less than 74 mph are capable of tossing around debris and causing damage similar to that seen in inland areas during Hurricane Fran especially in the Raleigh area. For this reason, you should seek shelter from the wind in a sturdy building as the hurricane moves inland and before the onset of tropical storm force winds. Tropical storm force winds usually strike hours ahead of the actual hurricane's eye. For this reason many emergency officials typically have evacuations completed and personnel sheltered before the onset of tropical storm force winds.

Hurricane force winds can easily destroy poorly constructed buildings and mobile homes. Debris such as signs, roofing material, and items left outside become flying missiles in high wind. Falling trees cause extensive damage to power lines, towers and underground water lines. This can cause extended disruptions of utility services. Damaging hurricane force winds can be just as devastating as tornadoes.

The strongest winds in the hurricane usually occur in the right side of the eyewall. Wind speed usually decreases significantly 12 hours after landfall. Nonetheless, as seen in hurricanes Hazel and Hugo...hurricane force winds can extend far inland, so those living along and near the hurricane forecast path should take the threat of flying debris and falling trees very seriously. Hurricane Hugo which made landfall near Charleston, South Carolina battered Charlotte...175 miles inland...with nearly 100 mph gusts.

You can protect windows by installing hurricane shutters or prepare 5/8 of an inch plywood panels. This will not only protect your windows, but it also keeps the wind out of your house. If the wind is able to enter a house through a window or door, it becomes much easier for the wind to destroy a home or building. Garage doors are also very susceptible to high wind and fail frequently in tropical storms and hurricanes when wind gusts exceed 70 mph. Reinforcing garage doors with affordable braces significantly increase structural integrity.

Things you can do before a storm threatens include assessing your homes landscaping and assess the threat from falling trees. Trim back any dead limbs

as well as large overhanging branches. Pick up all loose objects around the house including lawn furniture...grills and potted plants. Lastly have a plan of where to go if high wind threatens you. Talk with your family and let everyone know where your predetermined safe room is in your home. Again interior hallways, closets and bathrooms are the safest locations. Always stay away from windows and exterior doors.

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