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INDEPENDENT

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Hunkering Down – Hurricanes on Long Island

Last week, Hurricane Isaac gave the southeast US and Gulf Coast a pretty good dousing – and us a warning. Almost without exception, we get the tail, shoulder or rump of one or two of the dozen or so hurricanes that form up in the Atlantic between the Caribbean and Africa and bring so much destruction and misery with them as they thunder west and north. Hurricane season still has time to run. Isaac did most of his damage when he stalled over Louisiana – and dumped buckets of rain.

We live on an island.

Tidal Surges

For islanders, as bad as the winds will be (more on that below), it is the tides and tidal surges that will do most of the damage, which is why even these tails that go by every year leave so much trouble behind. The storm tide is added to the astronomical tides. And when those waves hit something solid, they generate force dozens of times more powerful than wind of the same speed. Andrew generated a storm tide of 17 feet. Camille in 1969? 24 feet.

Add to that the population growth in our area and the increase in the value of homes and it can spell either "an absolute disaster" or "they were prepared."

What Is It?

A hurricane is, in the words of scientists, an organized rotating weather system that develops in the tropics. Technically, it is a "tropical cyclone" and is classified as one of three states, with hurricanes being further classified into levels of destruction:

Tropical Depression: sustained winds of 38 mph (33 knots) or less

Tropical Storm: sustained winds of 39 to 73 mph (34-63 knots)

Hurricane: sustained winds of 74 mph (64 knots) or greater.

Hurricanes are called typhoons in the western Pacific and cyclones in the Indian Ocean. Six of one, a half dozen of the other.

Are You Ready For the Glancing Blow?

Look, if a Category 4 or 5 gets up here like in 1938, there are no levels of preparedness except evacuation. A storm surge like Camille's basically means that everything "south of the highway," as real estate agents like to classify the choicest properties on Long Island, is gone for all intents and purposes. But what if the glancing blow like Ivan's in 2004 or, Earl, who came by earlier in 2012, came in head-on? How can you be ready?

Before the Storm Arrives:

1. Have a family action plan – if you're at caught at school or at work, who do you call? To grandmother's house we go?
2. Are all flashlights working? Have canned goods and water supplies on hand? Cash? Portable radio?
3. Where ARE you going to move the boat? Don't even think about staying on her (more on that next week!).
4. How about your prescription medicines? A first-aid kit?

During the Storm

Have the radio or TV on. If power goes out and you don't have a portable radio, I'd get the kids in the car and evacuate. Shut all propane tanks off completely. Turn the refrigerator up all the way and don't open the door idly. Fill the bathtub with water. How about the big spaghetti pot? Anything that can hold water and keep it clean. If ordered to evacuate tell tell someone where you are going. Don't drive through flowing water. If here is no other way, call 911 or the US Coast Guard.

After the Storm

If you've been ordered to evacuate, don't go back until the area is declared safe. If you see someone who needs rescuing, unless the threat of loss of life is imminent, call 911. See standing water? Do you know if any power cables lie in it? Never use candles and other open flames indoors. Keep the flashlight at your side.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. But Isaac just sent us a wake-up call.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go directly to the D1SR Human Resources department, which is in charge of new members' matters, at DSO-HR and we will help you "get in this thing."