

2018 Houston Area Hurricane Season Begins June 1st

The last few years we've had a number of weather events which involved severe flooding. Hurricane Harvey was more water than wind. The last time Houston experienced hurricane-related winds was back in 2008 during Hurricane Ike. With Harvey, there were several suspected flood-related deaths. We need to keep in mind that hurricanes present increased hazards, including downed trees and power lines, and roof damage. Repairs can present significant hazards to workers. After Ike, work-related fatalities in Houston increased. The lesson learned is that planning, preparation and training can ensure our Houston workers return home safely at the end of the day.



One thing you may want to do is to ensure you have a business continuity plan in addition to an OSHA Emergency Action Plan (if required). The OSHA Emergency Action Plan is primarily directed at protecting workers during an emergency and not business continuity. They serve separate purposes and both are important. Your insurance carrier may have plans available for your use. There are several places where you can find examples of business continuity plans such as:

- Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS)
<http://disastersafety.org/ibhs-business-protection/ofb-ez-business-continuity/>
- FEMA Hurricane Ready Business Toolkit
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/152381>
- Texas OSHCON Sample OSHA Emergency Action Plan
<http://www.tdi.texas.gov/oshcon/>

The start of hurricane season is a good time to review your plan, make adjustments, and ensure the information is accurate. Run your plan through a test to ensure it operates as expected.

It is also important that employees have a home emergency action plan. By planning ahead, they can protect their family, property, and minimize damage. An employee who has a family action plan will be more likely to be available after the hurricane to help implement the return to business. Encourage employees to prepare and inform them of local planning checklists. If employees are not available after the hurricane, it will be more challenging to get your business operations up and running. Examples of family emergency plans can be found at:

- Ready Houston
<http://readyhouston.wpengine.com/prepare-today/make-a-plan/>
- Ready Harris County
http://prepare.readyharris.org/?_ga=2.174522466.1186323952.1527641542-1166658323.1527641542

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/index.html>
- National Hurricane Center (NHC)
<https://www.weather.gov/safety/hurricane>

Responding after a hurricane will present you with multiple hazards, many which can be life threatening. A worker who had been doing demolition work on Harvey flood-damaged houses died from necrotizing fasciitis e.g. the flesh eating bacteria. Safety and health information to train yourself and your employees, in conjunction with planning to ensure the necessary equipment, including safety and personal protective equipment, is readily available can prevent serious incidents. There are many resources available on hurricane-related safety, including the CDC and NHC websites mentioned above and:

- OSHA
<https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/hurricane/index.html>
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)
<https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2472>
- Short messages on hurricane safety for social media that can be used as reminders after a disaster:
https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/2017_hurricane_keymessages/docs/NIOSH_Emergency_Response_Key_Messages.pdf

Mention of any group or organization is not an endorsement and the links provided are for informational purposes only. This information has been developed by an OSHA Compliance Assistance Specialist and is intended to assist employers, workers, and others as they strive to improve workplace health and safety. While we attempt to thoroughly address specific topics [or hazards], it is not possible to include discussion of everything necessary to ensure a healthy and safe working environment in a presentation of this nature. Thus, this information must be understood as a tool for addressing workplace hazards, rather than an exhaustive statement of an employer's legal obligations, which are defined by statute, regulations, and standards. Likewise, to the extent that this information references practices or procedures that may enhance health or safety, but which are not required by a statute, regulation, or standard, it cannot, and does not, create additional legal obligations. Finally, over time, OSHA may modify rules and interpretations in light of new technology, information, or circumstances; to keep apprised of such developments, or to review information on a wide range of occupational safety and health topics, you can visit OSHA's website at www.osha.gov. For questions contact Jim Shelton at the Houston North Area Office at shelton.james@dol.gov.