

## Hurricane and Fire Evacuations Safety

*Loss Control note: With changing climate conditions bringing on stronger storms and more wildfires, risk management practices should be reviewed, including evacuations and site preparation. This is not an area of planning that you want to put off until the authorities announce a mandatory evacuation.*

During wildfire and hurricane season, you may be forced to evacuate your home or business. Most fire evacuations seem to provide at least a three-hour notice, and we generally have a couple of days warning with hurricanes. People are your first priority—you can take steps before and during an evacuation to reduce anxiety and avoid injuries. You can also make your site more fire and storm resistant.

Visit [www.nifc.gov/fireinfo/nfn.html](http://www.nifc.gov/fireinfo/nfn.html) for fire status information and <http://fire.boi.noaa.gov/> for your area's drought conditions. Visit [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov) for hurricane and storm updates.

### Before the Evacuation

- Coordinate with the American Red Cross and emergency agencies (such as FEMA) and give them the locations of your evacuation sites. Prepare and post route maps for each site.
- Consider forming a cooperative agreement with another site in your region to share resources and serve as an evacuation site.
- Prepare and post alternate route maps. In case of a large fire or hurricane shift, you may need to use "Plan B."
- Work with your regional Forest Service to train staff on emergency procedures during offsite trips, such as trail rides and hikes. Train staff to avoid areas such as closed-in box canyons during fires. Visit [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org) for training information and resources.
- Identify key equipment to be evacuated, including computers.
- Inventory and store equipment not taken on shelves covered in sealed plastic tarps.
- Prep a four-day supply of water and easily prepared food.

### During the Evacuation

- Explain your evacuation procedures. Arrange for people to communicate with their families.
- Identify special medical needs and gather necessary supplies, including trauma supplies.
- Make sure you have enough vehicles to evacuate everyone safely.
- Equip staff with emergency communications equipment (cell phones, whistles).
- Load key equipment, food, and water.
- Warn firefighters or rescue workers of underground fuel storage or LP gas tanks before you leave the site.
- Locate all emergency equipment for ready access.
- If you have horses or livestock, consider evacuating them or setting them loose in the safest areas. For horses, consider adding a two-day supply of feed.

(continued)

## **Filing Claims**

- Gather your important records, which may include your computer.
- Using a video or disposable camera, photograph buildings, interiors, and contents to help you document what was lost in the fire or storm.

## **Making Your Site Fire Resistant**

- Wet down buildings and roofs.
- Using qualified staff, cut down trees in the fire path.
- Using qualified staff, bulldoze a firebreak or cut field grass as short as possible.
- Remove brush and dry vegetation near buildings.
- Using qualified staff, disconnect and move LP gas tanks to a safer location, such as a gravel lot, or follow the manufacturer's instructions to empty the tanks.

## **Making Your Site Hurricane Resistant**

- Long-range planning should ensure that all new construction meets building codes (particularly the roofs). In coastal zones, plan to elevate the height of new buildings.
- Installing plywood sheets over exposed windows is a good practice. Usually, you can label and store these sheets and use them again.
- Equipment or supplies that are left behind and stored below the storm surge or flood levels will probably be ruined. Build storage that is high enough to raise the equipment left behind above these anticipated levels.
- Using qualified staff, cut down trees near key buildings. They can be cleaned up later—it's better to have trees on the ground than through your building.
- Turn off the gas, water, and electricity before evacuating. When you return, have a staff member with a fire extinguisher on hand for at least an hour after turning electricity and gas back on. Have water tested before drinking.
- Inspect buildings as soon as possible following the storm and protect them from further damage with tarps on the roofs. It's advisable to use teams of two or more staff so that they can look out for each other. In many storm-related claims, the largest expense isn't repairing the roof but the water damage to the interior of the buildings.

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If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at [safety1st@markelcorp.com](mailto:safety1st@markelcorp.com).