



# KNOW YOUR FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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## **HURRICANE SEASON IS HERE: HOW PREPARED ARE YOU?**

June 1<sup>st</sup> marks the beginning of Florida's hurricane season, and experts predict it will be another busy one. The words of Governor Jeb Bush have underscored a basic need emerging from the recent catastrophes wrought by hurricanes Ivan, Wilma, and Katrina, and the other major storms of recent seasons as he has urged Floridians to foster a "culture of preparedness." While government works to learn from past experience and to further prepare for future storms, it is incumbent upon all who are able to also prepare, while keeping in mind that in times of crisis the limited resources of government must be targeted to help society's most vulnerable like the poor, the elderly, and others with special needs. When a hurricane is days or hours away, and commodities are scarce, it may be too late to finalize preparations. Therefore, while time is on our side, we must all do what we can to protect our families, businesses, and property by developing a plan and taking some basic actions.

The 2006 Florida Legislature has also recognized the importance of storm preparation by, among other things, enacting a sales tax holiday enabling citizens and businesses to purchase certain storm preparation items tax free. I hope that everyone recently took advantage of this great opportunity. In addition, the Legislature has provided funding to upgrade local emergency operations centers, has improved

methods for tracking and distributing essential commodities, and addressed problems with sheltering during emergencies.

The Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) is doing its part by requiring investor owned electric utilities and phone companies to more frequently

inspect wooden poles so that their services may be more reliable in the event a hurricane hits, and so that services may be more rapidly restored when necessary. Electric utilities have submitted storm preparation plans to the Commission, and dockets have been opened to address other storm hardening issues.

### **What can you do to be prepared? Use this checklist as a guide:**

- ✓ From June 1 – November 30, stay alert to storm advisories in your area.
- ✓ Stock up on nonperishable foods (canned meats and vegetables), medicines, supplies, and pet food if you have pets.
- ✓ Keep on hand a working radio, flashlights, extra batteries, candles and oil lamps. Check regularly to ensure that they are in working order.
- ✓ Store drinking water in clean bottles. You may also use jugs, pans, and the bathtub if a major storm appears imminent.
- ✓ If someone in your home is dependent upon electric-powered, life-sustaining medical equipment, check with your utility on back-up facilities well in advance.
- ✓ Make special arrangements for the care of infants, the elderly, pets, and the physically impaired.
- ✓ Learn the evacuation route in your area, and fill your car with gasoline in case an evacuation is ordered.
- ✓ Keep a list of emergency phone numbers for police, fire, utility, and paramedic assistance.
- ✓ Keep a small amount of cash on hand since an extended power outage may prevent your from withdrawing money from ATMs or banks.
- ✓ Call relatives, neighbors, or local emergency officials if you anticipate needing a place to stay. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to make long distance calls than local calls. Make sure everyone in your family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.
- ✓ Keep important papers together. Make sure life, health, flood, and home insurance are in check; keep paperwork in a safe, waterproof container.
- ✓ Call your electric, gas and phone companies in case of outages during or after the storm. You may also contact the PSC at **1-800-342-3552**, if you have problems after contacting your utility.

In addition to the tips mentioned above, the Florida Division of Emergency Management has created a Web site, [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org), to help you plan to keep your family, employees, and property safe. The American Red Cross also has a Web site, [www.FloridaPreparesNow.org](http://www.FloridaPreparesNow.org), containing pertinent information about hurricane preparedness.

For more information or tips on hurricane preparedness, please call the PSC at **1-800-342-3552** and/or visit the PSC's Web site at [www.floridapsc.com](http://www.floridapsc.com). You may also e-mail us at [contact@psc.state.fl.us](mailto:contact@psc.state.fl.us).