



Florida leads nation in hurricane landfalls

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Florida's Severe Weather Awareness Week continues through Friday.

Severe Weather Awareness Week is an opportunity for Floridians to learn about the various weather hazards that frequently impact the state and how families and businesses can prepare for these natural events, state officials said in a news release.

Each day focuses on a specific weather event. Today's focus is hurricanes and flooding.

Florida has a long history of hurricanes. Records indicate that approximately 110 hurricanes and almost 200 tropical storms have impacted the state since 1851.

The unique location of Florida in the subtropics makes it vulnerable to tropical storms and hurricanes, and the relatively flat terrain can also make it susceptible to flooding. Florida is surrounded by very warm waters, which breed and support hurricanes: the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the west and the Caribbean Sea well to the south.

DID YOU KNOW? No other state in the country has more hurricane landfalls per year on average than Florida does. Nearly 40 percent of all hurricanes that strike the United States make landfall in Florida.

The official North Atlantic Ocean hurricane season begins June 1 and continues through Nov. 30. The typical peak is during August and September. It is important to remember that it is possible for Florida to be impacted by tropical weather systems outside of hurricane season as early as May and as late as December.

Residents and visitors need to plan ahead and remain ready for possible hurricane impacts.

The 2011 season recorded 19 named storms. Seven of those storms developed into hurricanes, four of which were classified as major hurricanes. For the sixth consecutive year, Florida has escaped major impacts from hurricanes. However, Floridians know that it only takes one storm to affect our state for long lasting impacts to be felt. This is why having a family and business emergency plan and disaster supply kit ready year-round is extremely important in Florida.

Meteorologists use the Saffir-Simpson Scale to rate the strength of a hurricane based on wind speed. When a storm's maximum sustained winds reach 74 mph, it is considered a hurricane. When sustained wind speeds reach 111 mph, the storm is considered a major hurricane. When a tropical system approaches the state, The National Hurricane Center will issue watches and warnings.

- A Watch is issued 48 hours in advance of the time dangerous winds are possible within the specified area. A watch should trigger your family's emergency plan, and protective measures should be initiated.
- A Warning is issued 36 hours prior to the time when damaging winds are expected. Once a warning has been issued, your family should be in the process of completing protective actions and deciding the safest location to be during the storm.

Your main protection against hurricanes is to be prepared and have a plan. Hurricane-force winds can easily destroy poorly constructed buildings and mobile homes. For your hurricane emergency plan, first determine whether you live in an evacuation zone. Your local emergency management office can provide this information. If you do live in an evacuation zone, plan when and where you will go to pass the storm, and keep emergency telephone numbers handy. Second, have a disaster supply kit ready with enough provisions to last 3 to 5 days.

While hurricanes are known and feared for their ferocious winds, historically it is the water that causes most of the deaths in hurricanes. About 90 percent of all hurricane fatalities occur from drowning in either storm surge or freshwater flooding.

Flooding is a serious concern in Florida since it can happen anywhere and at any time. Effects from flooding can be localized, impacting just a few streets, or very large, affecting multiple cities, counties and even whole states. Most flooding related deaths in the United States are due to people driving cars into flooded areas. Once a vehicle begins to float, the situation for its occupants becomes dangerous and often deadly.

DID YOU KNOW? Just 6 inches of fast-moving floodwater can knock you off your feet and 2 feet of water can sweep an SUV off a road. Residents should be aware of their location with respect to flood-prone areas and know evacuation routes. Using extreme caution is urged when driving in heavy rains, especially when water covers the road. Because it is difficult to determine the depth of water or the condition of the road under the water, if you come to a flooded road, remember the phrase "Turn Around, Don't Drown".

National Flood Safety Awareness Week is March 12 -16. National Hurricane Preparedness Week is May 28-June 1. For more information about hurricanes, flooding and what you can do to protect yourself and others, visit ww.nhc.noaa.gov, <http://www.weather.gov/floodsafety/> or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

Friday's topic is temperatures extremes and wildfires.

For more information on the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: www.FloridaDisaster.org. Follow us on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/FLSERT and on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/FloridaSERT.