

Weather Reporting Safety Tips, Concurrent Sessions 3/WATER, October 6, SEJ2017

Driving

Beware of driving in water. It can be done but caution is the key.

- Try to understand how deep the water is and know how deep your vehicle is capable of.
- Try to keep the water below your exhaust pipe.
- If you drive deeper than that, it is important to keep the engine pushing exhaust out.
- If you should flood your car, water will enter the exhaust system. At this point, **DO NOT TRY TO START YOUR CAR**. Have it towed and pumped out. It's not expensive and will save your car.

Be aware that when driving into a flooded area it can still be filling up, so you may not be able to get out the same way you got in.

Many areas have laws against driving down flooded streets. You can be cited, or worse yet, shot at by angry homeowners (it's happened) so if you drive through a neighborhood, go extremely slowly.

Fill up your gas tank before the storm; carry extra gas with you if you can and if it's safe to do so.

When all businesses are closed because of a disaster, some gas stations will leave their pumps on with credit card readers available.

Getting wet

Beware of downed power lines. Some areas of water can be electrified. If in doubt, do not go into water.

Beware of floating masses of fire ants.

When wading in floodwaters, boots and waders are a bad idea, for if they are topped, boots become a hindrance and waders can drown you.

- Try to stay dry, but once you decide you have to get wet, be all in.
- Wear water shoes or tennis shoes, shorts and t-shirts.
- If you still have a pair of crocs hanging around, your closet, they're great for this.

- **What to bring**
- Ziploc bags for your wallet, keys and cell phone. Always have cash with you.
- Carry food and water with you. Keep extra clothes, towels and a sleeping bag in your car.
- Keep a power inverter in your car. Your job is impossible without electricity.
- A Leatherman tool is a wonderful thing
- If you already don't have, get the WWL TV app for your iPhone. Their live TV rocks on the phone and they have the best immediate weather updates, usually live.
- Pencils write better on wet paper.

Being a storm chaser is not a game. Some learn this the hard way. Victims of a storm appreciate sincere and compassionate journalism. Be nice and sympathetic to everyone: cops, fire personnel, flood victims, they can often get you better access.

If people need help, help them first and then report.

Pre-weather prep

Clear out your iPhone photos / videos so you have enough memory on the phone.

Build gallery and writing posts before you head out. Save links on your desktop to find quickly.

Your laptop and cell phone will be your anchors during a storm. Now is the time to update information on them for use in an emergency.

- Source phone numbers:

Prepare a list of contacts of emergency preparedness officials at the city/town, parish/county, state and federal level.

This list should include both traditional public information contact numbers, home/cell phones, emails, twitter and facebook contacts for senior officials and other experts for all categories below.

The list should include these categories:

Local/state/federal Homeland Security/Emergency Preparedness/FEMA

Police/sheriff/state police/FBI/DEA/ICE

Fire
National Guard
State wildlife and fisheries/natural resources departments and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Local/parish environment, state environmental quality, Environmental Protection Agency at regional and national level
Army Corps of Engineers
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Local/state building inspection personnel
State insurance departments
Non-Governmental Organizations including:
American Red Cross, local and state
Salvation Army; Lutheran emergency preparedness organization; Mennonite emergency response
Local environmental groups
Local estuary or bay programs
Regional National Weather Service officials, national National Weather Service pio contacts
National Hurricane Center
University disaster/emergency preparedness contacts. *These can include university response training programs, professors specializing in disaster research, civil engineering professors, other engineering professors, storm surge computer modelers, geology and geography professors.*
Institute for Business and Home Safety
Insurance Information Institute
Insurance companies most active in your area: State Farm, Allstate, state- insurance pools, reinsurance companies.

- Relevant web bookmarks and passwords. (You may want to create entries in your outlook people file for sites that need passwords.)
- Consider programming source and NOLA.com contact numbers into your phone, as well.

Call the agencies you cover and pinpoint folks who will be in charge of their hurricane operations. Get cell phone numbers, email addresses, follow them on social media networks. Find out what their plans are for riding out storm, where they'll be, what they'll be doing.

Get written copy of agency hurricane plans, preferably electronic copies.

If cell phone towers become inoperable, remember that texting might still be working, even if voice communication is not.

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Your hurricane kit:

Plastic bags for notebooks, phones, laptops, batteries, etc.

Consider getting external phone battery, inverter that can charge phone and computer from car.

Rain gear, water, non-perishable food, sleeping bag, cash, several changes of rugged clothes and shoes.

Your own important papers: Prescription information, insurance, identification, other valuables.

Strategize about where you will go for coverage, always placing your own safety first.

Emergency operation center or rare shelter is best because

1. stories will be coming to you
2. emergency officials are more likely to be available in case you get in trouble
3. more likely to be able to catch ride with National Guard, Wildlife and Fisheries, FEMA, that will be ferrying victims in or checking in.

Avoid motels. They're not built to withstand hurricane winds or water, are likely to lose their roofs, and then you'll be stuck without access to communications or emergency assistance.