

SUN

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Guest commentary

By Jeff Braun

Time for residents to prepare for Hurricane season

Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Management frequently receives questions about hurricanes and the threat they pose.

Here are answers to the most common questions:

Fort Bend vulnerable to hurricanes?

If a hurricane makes landfall anywhere from Matagorda Bay to Galveston Bay, our County could sustain damage from high

winds, inland flooding, and tornadoes. Hurricane-force winds can occur over 175 miles away from the center of a storm. Inland flooding is also a threat. In most cases, the heaviest rainfall occurs away from the center of the storm, flooding rivers, streams and even roadways. Flooding is the No. 1 cause of weather-related deaths in Texas. Had Fort Bend seen 36 inches of rain like Houston did during

Tropical Storm Allison, we would have also experienced significant flooding. Tornadoes usually accompany hurricanes and are responsible for damage far away from the eye of the storm. Luckily, because Fort Bend County sits inland from the coast, we are not at a storm surge risk.

What is the difference between a watch and a warning?

A hurricane watch is issued

when a hurricane is about 36 hours away from landfall.

You should begin preparing your home for a possible landfall. If you plan on evacuating leave now.

A hurricane warning is issued when the storm is 24 hours away from land and winds have reached 74 mph or greater. Tropical Storm Warnings are

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also issued during a hurricane — when winds will reach tropical storm-force in the area.

How long does Hurricane Season last?

Hurricane Season begins June 1 and lasts through Nov. 30. Storms can occur outside of hurricane Season. Tropical Storm Zeta developed in December 2005. August, September and October are the most dangerous months for a hurricane when the Gulf is at its warmest.

How are hurricanes rated?

Hurricanes are rated by a scale called the Saffir-Simpson meas-

ured from 1 to 5 based on the speed of winds. A Category 4 storm will cause about 100 times the damage of a Category 1 Storm. Both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were rated as Category 3 storms at landfall.

When and how should I prepare for Hurricane Season?

Now! It is important to prepare early. First, make a plan on what you will do if a hurricane threatens our area. Get water, food, flashlights and batteries now — you won't be able to find those items by the time a hurricane watch or warning is issued. Fort

Bend County's Emergency Management website gives you a list of additional items to assemble in a disaster supplies kit.

Do I need Flood Insurance?

Yes. About 30 percent of flood insurance claims come from areas outside the floodplain. Regular insurance will not cover flood damage. If you do not live in the floodplain, flood insurance is cheaper than living in a flood plain and averages a few hundred dollars a year.

Should I evacuate?

Since Fort Bend County is not within a mandatory evacuation