



Frequently Asked Questions

National Hurricane Program

Q: What is the National Hurricane Program?

A: Established in 1985, the National Hurricane Program (NHP) conducts assessments and provides tools and technical assistance to assist State and local agencies in developing hurricane evacuation plans. The program is a multi-agency partnership, involving the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Association, the National Weather Service, U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and numerous other Federal agencies.

Q: What is the NHP's current level of funding?

A: NHP receives \$5.86 million in annual funding, which consists of \$2.91 million for FEMA program activities and \$2.95 million for the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) program, which is directed into general State funds for hurricane preparedness and mitigation activities. The FEMA program activities include annual funding for hurricane evacuation studies.

Q: How does NHP develop evacuation plans?

A: FEMA, State and local agencies, and other Federal agencies conduct hurricane evacuation studies to guide the decisions that protect the public when a hurricane threatens an area. These studies determine the probable effects of a hurricane, predict public response to the threat and advisories, and identify shelters to ultimately form the basis of evacuation plans.

The agencies conduct a hurricane surge analysis of all types of storms. This entails an assessment of potential hazards, existing road and other transportation systems, the population (e.g., demographics, behavior analysis), and shelters. Based on this information, officials determine where individuals are most likely to go when fleeing from a storm.

Based on these studies, the NHP provides targeted communities with a recommendation for evacuation zones. This recommendation is negotiated with each community. Once the evacuation zones are established, the NHP provides each community with corresponding evacuation maps and suggested clearance times for the various types of storm categories. The communities determine how to utilize these tools and recommendations in developing their evacuation plans.

Q: Does NHP have the authority to require the States or local communities to follow their evaluation recommendations?

A: No, the NHP does not have any authority over or role in the specific development and implementation of the State and local evacuation plans.



Q: How is NHP responding to the Hurricane Katrina disaster?

A: In response to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA is working with Federal, State, and local officials to establish an approach for conducting a post-storm assessment. FEMA routinely conducts post-storm assessments to determine how well the NHP tools and products have assisted State and local evacuation decision makers. This involves hazard, transportation, and behavioral analyses of evacuations.

While funding and other resources to conduct a Hurricane Katrina post-storm assessment currently are pending, FEMA is developing a plan to analyze the impacted evacuation roadway networks, storm surge basins, and evacuation clearance times that were applied to the response. The findings of this assessment will help uncover necessary improvements for decision assistance models and tools to ensure the effectiveness of future evacuation orders.

Q: Did FEMA know that a hurricane of this magnitude could strike Louisiana?

A: Yes, FEMA recognized the potential for a massive hurricane to hit Louisiana. The potential for large Category 4 or 5 hurricanes has always existed throughout the Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Region.

FEMA has conducted hurricane evacuation studies of Louisiana and provided the results to the State. Various coordination meetings and training sessions also have been held to address the study products with Federal, State, and local officials.

Hurricane evacuation studies determine the hurricane surge inundation areas for all category storms. From these inundation areas, evacuation zones are developed in coordination with State and local emergency management officials. These zones are used to determine where and when the public will be ordered to evacuate.

Q: What steps did NHP take in response to the hurricane threat?

A: A Hurricane Liaison Team was deployed to the National Hurricane Center in Miami, prior to the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. The team assisted in coordinating advisories from the National Hurricane Center to the Federal, State, and local emergency management agencies. The FEMA Regional Hurricane Program Managers also held periodic calls with State and local officials to coordinate evacuation operations.

Q: What is NHP doing now to prepare for other potential hurricane threats in both the near and distant future – particularly in the Hurricane Katrina-affected areas?

A: The FEMA Regional Hurricane Managers will discuss with the State Program Managers any changes that must be applied to the existing evacuation plans due to the physical and infrastructure damage from Hurricane Katrina.



Q: What is the difference between evacuation zones and flood zones?

A: Evacuation zones are determined by Evacuation Zone Maps. These maps delineate zones that are determined based on the estimated inland extent of the hurricane surge by category of hurricane, and a definable geographic or physical feature such as a river or road. The evacuation zones may extend inland beyond the hurricane zone to the nearest geographic feature. This makes it easier for officials to communicate who must evacuate (e.g everyone living east of Highway 1, where Highway 1 is the western border of the evacuation zone). Based on the severity of the storm, State or local officials may call for a mandatory evacuation by zone. Evacuation Zone Maps are purposefully conservative in their estimates of surge inundation areas, because they are used for evacuation and life safety purposes.

Flood zones are determined by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) flood hazard maps, known as flood insurance rate maps (FIRMs). These maps delineate the one percent chance flood (100-year flood) for all coastal areas. This is based on a statistical analysis of all of the probable storms impacting a coastal area. FIRMs are used for insurance and floodplain management purposes. Any new construction or substantial improvement to existing construction must be elevated to or above the flood elevation on the FIRMs.

Homeowners should have a good understanding of each of the maps discussed above and the location of their property on each map in order to understand the risk.