

Department of Systemwide Safety and Emergency Management
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

Hurricane Safety Information

The following information was obtained from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to be reviewed and implemented in the event of severe weather. The Atlantic hurricane season lasts from June to November, with the peak season from mid-August to late October. Administrators should share this information with students, staff, and parents as appropriate. Also, NOAA weather radios and emergency phones should be continuously monitored. Questions regarding this information may be directed to the Department of Systemwide Safety and Emergency Management at 240-740-3066.

About Hurricanes

A hurricane is a tropical storm with winds that have reached a constant speed of 74 miles per hour or higher. Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to coastlines and several hundred miles inland. Hurricanes are classified using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale (1 through 6)—the higher the number, the stronger the winds. Hurricanes and tropical storms also can spawn tornadoes and microbursts, create surges along the coast, and cause extensive damage due to inland flooding from trapped water. Tornadoes most often occur in thunderstorms embedded in rain bands well away from the center of the hurricane; however, they also occur near the eye-wall.

Hurricane Watch vs. Hurricane Warning

It is important to know the difference between hurricane watches and warnings. A *hurricane watch* is an announcement that a hurricane could pose a possible threat to a specified coastal area within 36 hours. A watch is used to inform the public and marine interests of the storm's location, intensity, and movement. A *hurricane warning* is an announcement that sustained winds of 74 mph (64 knots) or higher associated with a hurricane are expected in a specified coastal area within 24 hours or less. A hurricane warning can remain in effect when dangerously high water or a combination of dangerously high water and exceptionally high waves continue, even though winds may be less than hurricane force. A warning also is used to inform the public and marine interests of the storm's location, intensity, and movement. The National Hurricane Center chooses a distance of approximately 300 miles.

Steps to Take to Ensure Preparedness in Case of a Severe Weather Alert

1. Start and run the emergency generator for a period of time to ensure that the appropriate transfer load occurs. Report any problems to the Maintenance depot.
2. Clean all roofs, gutters, and drains; and remove any debris that may clog the drains.
3. Remove and store all outside objects that may be blown away, e.g., trashcans.
4. Check all wet vacuums and cleaning equipment. Notify the plant operations supervisor if this equipment is not functioning.
5. Check the emergency kit and first aid kits regularly to ensure readiness of supplies.
6. Check all flashlights and portable radios and make sure the batteries are operational.
7. Ensure that the Nextel emergency phone is charged and programmed properly.
8. Ensure that the NOAA alert radio is operational and properly located for monitoring.
9. Review emergency/crisis plans with appropriate staff.
10. Be alert to weather updates and emergency announcements.

Make sure supplies in the kit are available—especially flashlights, AM/FM radio/flashlight combinations with extra batteries, and first aid kits among other items. Ensure that the emergency kit cell phone is fully charged. Also, make sure that a 9-volt battery is in place in the NOAA alert radio to enable the radio to continue receiving weather alert messages in the event of a power failure.

Online hurricane fact sheets can be found on the FEMA website—www.ready.gov/hurricanes. Although this information is geared for private homes, some information is useful in the school environment. Additional sources of information about hurricanes and emergency preparedness are as follows:

FEMA: www.fema.gov
NOAA: www.noaa.gov
Montgomery County: www.montgomerycountymd.gov