

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – THE MARINA HURRICANE PLAN AND CITY ORDINANCE

Because this year's hurricane season is far from over – both literally and figuratively – I'm offering a few clarifications to the City and Marina Hurricane Plan by way of this "Frequently Asked Questions" format. Please take a close look below and if, after reading, you have any questions, please feel free to call my cell anytime day or night at 228-669-4734 so together we can bring further clarification to the hurricane plan and its expectations for all tenants.

Q: Why does the Marina use the National Hurricane Center (NHC) as its go-to source for everything tropical related?

A: They are the experts, they have access to data that very few others have, they've been doing it since 1964, and their track guidance over the years has notably and significantly improved to a point where our confidence in their forecasted landfall points and their outlooks are virtually fool-proof. Agreeably, their (and others) intensity modeling is still to be perfected, but for track guidance they're pretty much impossible to beat and generally spot on within just a few miles.

Q: Why does the marina have a hurricane plan?

A: The primary reason for the hurricane plan is to ensure there's no loss of valuable and extremely expensive resources – both the City's and yours – when a 4' or greater storm surge is forecasted by the NHC.

Q: Why does the Harbormaster use the NHC's 4-foot surge forecast to trigger an order of mandatory evacuation?

A: At normal high tide, the top of the perimeter wall that surrounds the basin is about five feet above that sea level. So, if we have a four-foot rise in seawater, the water on the basin side (and on the gulf side) is now only about one foot shy of the top of the wall. Because we are a gulf-front marina with absolutely NO PROTECTION from the east, southeast, and south, any wind-driven waves on top of the "surge" will overtop the wall and bring those same wind-driven waves into the basin and significantly rock any boats remaining. Boats that are significantly rocking have an extreme tendency to break lines!! Agreeably, if the water could always be guaranteed to be calm with no waves on top, we (and you) could easily handle a four-foot rise in seawater. But, given that we are wide open to Gulf from the E, SE, and S, it is highly doubtful that the rising water will remain calm and peaceful throughout any approaching tropical storm or hurricane.

Q: Should I wait until the Harbormaster orders a mandatory evacuation before I evacuate my boat from the Marina?

A: The quick and easy answer is NO. Oftentimes, there's only about a 36-hour lead time between the NHC surge forecast and the time that same surge reaches our location. In that 36 hours, the waters are getting rougher in the Sound and some boaters will be opposed to navigating during that period. If you are uncomfortable with moving your boat when the waters in the Sound are a bit rougher than usual, it would be prudent for you to implement **your own VOLUNTARY evacuation** well ahead of the time when it is formally ordered by my office. The worst that could happen is that you might move for no reason! There's always a plethora of information available from the NHC from the moment a storm becomes just a tropical wave to the time it develops into something more destructive. A general rule of thumb for anyone who keeps their boat in a gulf-front marina is this --- paying extremely close attention to the NHC as it forecasts tropical storm systems is an absolute requirement for any boat owner – but especially those with boats in gulf-front locations! There should never be any surprises simply because I order a mandatory evacuation at some point! By that time, your OWN plan should have been well underway and moving to a safer location should become rote and routine.

Q: What if I can't personally move my boat because I'm out of town, or my job requires me to be on-call, or for any number of other reasons?

A: The most fundamental advice for this situation is to plan well ahead of time to ensure you have someone who will reliably and unquestionably move your boat on your behalf no later than the time an order for mandatory evacuation is issued. Being out of town, on call, or even having mechanical problems does not cancel out the requirement to move your boat when an approaching tropical system prompts an order for mandatory evacuation. Plan for the worst and hope for the best. Regardless of the reason for not evacuating, the end result and consequences will be the same.

Q: Who can issue, change, and/or cancel an order for mandatory evacuation?

A: As made into law by City Ordinance, only the City's duly assigned Harbormaster may issue, change, cancel, or rescind such an order. As a result, if there is anyone else with whom you're in contact who is downplaying or ignoring the order, please be sure to call my cell phone (again, anytime) and let ME help you make your decision. In other words, no one else is in any position to act contrary to the order unless that contrary action first comes from my office. Bottom line – if your boat does not leave when ordered to do so by the declaration of mandatory evacuation, it is SOLELY on your shoulders to handle the consequences that will surely follow which include paying potentially millions of dollars for damage to City property, paying a daily fine of \$1,000, and being charged with a court-ordered misdemeanor. Seems that none of these consequences are worth not relocating your boat to a safer location before a land-falling tropical system impacts our marina...

Q: Who should I contract with to move my boat during an order for mandatory evacuation?

A: That's completely up to the tenant. But, you should (a) be planning well ahead of time, (b) be getting your agreement or contract in writing to include what will happen if the contractor doesn't fulfill his or her part of the contract, and (c) be sure you and person moving your boat are on the exact same page and that both parties are fully aware of the Marina's hurricane plan, its expectations, and its zero-tolerance policy when an order for mandatory evacuation is ordered.

Agreeably, much if not most of the above sounds very bureaucratic and formal – and it is. But it only applies when tropical systems are forecast to impact our area. Otherwise, on the other 360+ days, this is a beautiful marina, with a magnificent staff, and a whole group of wonderful tenants and boaters who want nothing more than to simply enjoy their boats and the laid-back marina environment and lifestyle. Let's all allow those peaceful and storm-free days to override the heartache that oftentimes comes along with the Atlantic hurricane season!