**Hurricane Hazards**

Living in Southwest Florida means that each year from June 1 through Nov. 30, residents are at risk of being impacted by a hurricane. Previous hurricane seasons are not accurate indicators of the risk each year. Whether the season’s activity is forecast to be a “higher than average,” “average,” or “lower than average,” the risk is the same. It only takes one hurricane to affect the community.

There are specific risks associated with hurricanes, such as wind, tornadoes, heavy rainfall and storm surge. Of these, storm surge and rainfall flooding pose the greatest risk to life.

**Storm surge**

Storm surge is an abnormal rise of water generated by a tropical storm or hurricane that moves ashore prior to and during a hurricane making landfall. As the tropical storm or hurricane makes landfall, rising water levels of 2 to 30 feet (depth of water above ground level) may occur along the coastal counties, major rivers of Southwest Florida and even Lake Okeechobee. This is enough to overwhelm most populated areas.

Due to the low elevation and proximity to beaches and other tidal waters (rivers, creeks and canals), storm surge can travel far inland in Lee County. Storm surge forecasts do not account for the large, crashing waves and the debris they carry. Every part of the county is at risk of storm surge depending on the size and the direction of the storm.

The surge waters that come up quickly will recede very slowly. The foundations of some homes may fail under the stress of storm surge as well. The standing water, and the ground, will contain debris, chemicals and raw sewage. Electricity will be out for a long time and even when restored, many houses will be unable to receive power due to the damage sustained in the storm. Tap water, if available at all, will be unsafe for drinking, bathing or cooking.

Roadways and bridges will sustain heavy damage, or fail entirely, due to surge and waves. Roads that remain will be covered in flood water, debris or both. These same problems will delay emergency responders.

**Rainfall flooding**

Over the past 30 years, freshwater flooding has caused more drowning deaths than storm surge. Heavy rains can create massive health problems and have a disastrous effect on a community’s ability to recover quickly.

Torrential rains associated with slow moving, or stationary, tropical storms and hurricanes on average can produce 16 inches of rain within a 24- to 36-hour period.

The flood waters, and the ground, may contain debris, chemicals, dead animals and raw sewage.

Electricity cannot be restored to homes when there are high water levels surrounding them. Well water may be unsafe for drinking, bathing or cooking. Septic tanks may fail or be damaged.

Young children and animals can drown, be injured or become severely ill from playing or swimming in flood waters.

Remember, you can’t always see what dangers are in the water. Stay dry and stay safe.