**After the Storm**

After major storms our lives can change drastically. These disasters affect everyone. Relief sup­plies and other aid will be arriving as quickly as possible, but may take several days. Try to remain calm, pa­tient and understanding. Your attitude affects you and everyone around you. Remember that the longest and hard­est part of dealing with a hurricane is the recovery.

There may be residual flooding and roads may be blocked for days or weeks, making damaged areas inac­cessible. This may mean that you will not be allowed back to your home for days or weeks.

Emergency workers want your return home to be as safe as possible and need time to clear safe access and secure hazards. Listen to local media for reentry information and do not go into unsafe areas. Drive only if absolutely neces­sary and avoid flooded roads and washed out bridges. Do not go sightseeing.

Gaining access to your residence of business will require a form of identification (Driver’s License, electric bill, etc.). Sanibel/Captiva and Fort Myers Beach require Hurricane Passes obtained from the city.

If you evacuated out of the area, consider staying away for a few extra days. Before you decide to return, consider the following:

* Power will be out for an undeter­mined period of time. This means no air conditioning, no lights, no refrig­eration, no water pump and, in many cases, no stove.
* Telephone service will be out or limited. This includes 911. Lack of power and damaged facilities will affect both landline and cellular telephone service. Even if your phone works, use it only for emergencies. Texting may be more successful than voice calls.
* County and municipal water supplies may be unsafe to drink without boiling or chemical treatment. Treat all water as unsafe until you are notified that it is safe.
* Sewer lift stations may not work, meaning toilets will not flush and sinks will not drain. They may backup into your home or property.

When you do return, some damage may not be readily apparent.

* Inspect your home for damage. Start at the outside and work your way inside. Check for water and sewer line damage. Check the electrical system. Turn off the main breaker until you are sure the system is safe. Check for natural gas and/or bottled gas leaks. Do not enter or stay in a structure if you smell gas.
* Be careful when you go outside. Pay attention to where you walk and stand. Avoid any downed wires or standing water. Report downed wires to your utility company or to emer­gency services.
* Check above you for low-hanging ob­jects or things that could fall.
* Beware of wild animals that might be dangerous. Fire ants, bees, wasps, snakes, rodents and other wild animals will be seeking high ground. They can cre­ate health and safety hazards.
* Be careful of domestic animals; even ones you know. They may be fright­ened or injured and more dangerous than you expect.
* Do not connect generators to your house wiring. Service personnel can be killed, or fires started elsewhere. Use your generator only in a well-ventilated area and shut it down dur­ing re-fueling.
* Take pictures of the damage, both to the house and its contents for insur­ance claims. Be sure to date-time stamp the photos. Insurance companies will send special disaster assistance teams, as will the state and federal governments. Still, it may be more than a week before those teams are able to get into operation. Have all your insurance documents ready and be patient.

When help does arrive, some may be in the form of the unscrupulous for­tune seekers.

* Do not sign repair con­tracts until you have checked out the contractor.
* Do not pay for any servic­es until the work has been completed.
* Ask for a valid county contractor’s li­cense. Is the contractor bonded? Does the price seem fair? Are high-pressure tactics being used?

Report suspi­cious contractors to authorities. If you see unfairly high prices being charged, report it. Local authorities want to help our residents by requiring competence and fairness.

For more information contact the Emergency Management Office in your county.