News

Prepare for stormy summer, officials say

BY MATT ROCHELEAU FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE Friday, July 11, 2008 1:11 AM EDT

With hurricane season here, residents are told to get emergency supplies together before the next bad storm arrives in New England

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Within 36 hours, Tropical Storm Bertha became the season's first hurricane, peaked at Category 3 headed toward the East Coast, and has now weakened to a Category 1 storm not expected to strike the East Coast.

Though anticlimactic, Bertha serves as a reminder of how weather can change literally overnight, and being ready for Mother Nature's worst can make all the difference.

Forecasters Thursday night cautioned that Bertha could strengthen and menace Bermuda.

"In this day and age, people get a fair warning ahead of time," Attleboro police Capt. David Proia said.

However, he and most officials agree the most common cause for problems during severe weather arise from residents who are unaware and unprepared. Local officials have provided some insight on how to stay safe during the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from June 1 through November 30.

North Attleboro Fire Chief Peter Lamb said preparation should begin no later than when the storm is about 72 hours, or three days away.

Residents should be self-sustainable for about three days, which includes a stockpile of non-perishable food and enough bottled water for everyone in the household, he said.

Once a storm strikes, the most important tip officials offer is to stay inside and off roadways until it has passed.

Proia suggested people keep the following items at hand during extreme weather: portable radio to hear weather updates, flashlights, batteries, first aid kits, charged cell phones, blankets, enough of any prescription medicine to last about a week, tools and plywood to cover windows. Residents also should fill the family car with gas in case of an evacuation.

An evacuation of Attleboro would be unlikely because the city is far enough inland, however it could host people fleeing from the coast.

Attleboro would prepare for such a situation by opening shelters, likely at Attleboro High School and other available school buildings, Proia said.

The public works department would be out to clear roads of any debris. An emergency operation center would be set up and emergency crews would have extra staff, he said.

Following are tips provided by Ray Cord with Norton's Community Emergency Response Team:

If a hurricane is due to hit our area, bring in all outside furniture and decorations and secure all awnings and canopies. When a storm hits, move to an interior room or the basement, staying away from windows and doors.

In the aftermath of a storm, watch out for broken glass, sharp metal and downed power lines. Assume that all downed lines are live.

If evacuated to an emergency shelter, bring prescriptions, blankets, pillows, books and games, but no pets. Except for guide animals, pets are not allowed in shelters. Special pet shelters will be designated.

Photograph and property damage and attempt to salvage any "before" pictures to help document your loss and eligibility for assistance.

Red Cross guidelines say to plan ahead for the possibility of becoming separated from family or friends.

Because local phone lines may be out of service or overloaded after a disaster, designate an out-of-town contact that each family member can call or e-mail.

Consider having a laminated wallet-sized card made with the contact information.

Contact the American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter for more tips on preparing for this year's hurricane season: Toll free 1-800-842-1122 or 401-831-7700.

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