

Two Years, Three Hurricanes

A Lot of Lessons

By Steve Wright, CGCS



Some of the hurricane damage at Boca West Country Club 2004.

The threat of hurricanes is a fact of life in the Carolinas, even inland. Heavy rains can cause flooding leading to damage just as devastating as that wrought by winds and storm surges in coastal areas. While the Gulf States suffered horrendously last year, the Carolinas escaped with minimal impact. Steve Wright, a Carolinas GCSA past president, moved to Florida from Hilton Head several years ago and has been battered repeatedly by storms at Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton. Here he offers some tips to help minimize impacts of the new hurricane season.

The best thing about a hurricane is that you know it's coming. The worst thing about a hurricane is you know it's coming! For days, sometimes weeks, the media hype will drive you crazy. Sometimes I think they really want it to hit so they have something to report on. Face it though we get plenty of advance notice and even the tracking is fairly accurate. Hurricane Wilma followed a track that was plotted at least a week earlier. She just decided to visit the Yucatan and spin a day or two longer.

Hurricane preparation at your course should start the last day of hurricane season...last year. Before June 1 make a quick check of that same prepared list. If you don't have a list, make one. Once you begin your pre-season checklist also inspect the shop for worse-case scenarios. What's the worst case...you'll get a direct hit. Always update that list and add anything that comes to mind.



A view of hurricane damage 2005 style.

SHOOT IT

This year start by video taping everything. If you don't have a video, take photos to show shop, equipment, office, and conditions on the golf course, such as bridges, bathrooms, signage etc. This is one time that a picture is worth a thousand words. Photos are crucial to making successful, accurate, insurance claims. Images can be especially helpful when it comes to sand in bunkers, the amount of trees or importance of trees on the course. They can also help illustrate inventory.

Should a storm really threaten your area or your course is in the "cone of uncertainty" it's time to take some steps to protect your club's assets. Remember you should still have enough time if you're prepared.

Start at the shop. Remove or discard all those things that accumulate at the shop. Debris or old materials are the top of the list for the dumpster. Pallets are the first things that come to mind. Secure all small items inside the building including hoses, trash cans, picnic tables.

FUEL UP

Purchase a small generator. Fuel up all equipment and then refill your fuel tanks again. Make or purchase a hand crank so you can get the fuel out of the tanks even if you lose electricity.

Park equipment in an open area. Choose the best place possible. You won't need your mowers as much as you will need the tractors, trucks, loaders and vehicles for hauling debris. Secure all other equipment in the building and park equipment up against

the garage doors to help prevent blow in.

Remove radio antennas, irrigation or drainage pipes and any wood and store inside. Check your chemical and fertilizer storage room. Get everything off the floor and cover with tarps.

Stock up on gloves, first aid kits, extra rakes, tarps, and duct tape and rain gear. Prep chainsaws and ensure you have necessary supplies like oil, wrenches, extra chains and gas. Make sure key personnel have saws and gas in case they have to cut their way back in to the property.

Establish a return date with your staff. Distribute cell phone numbers and club identification forms so staff may return. Some police roadblocks will not allow anyone past. A letter from the club with club ID could make the difference.

Back up any data from computers, then turn them off, wrap



Equip key personnel with chainsaws in case they need to cut their way back into the golf course.

in plastic and store off the floor in a secure room. Any important files or personnel items should be handled the same way. Shutter or plywood any windows or doors. Lock up and turn off the power at the main panel.

IRRIGATION

If you can lower your lakes at all do so. Especially effluent ponds. Part of South Florida's preparation is to dump water out of Lake Okeechobee and all the various canals that crisscross South Florida. It works here, it could also help you.

Secure your pump house and supplies that might be around it. Start by securing your repair hatch and remove any antennae. It's easy to do and if you don't, the equipment is expensive to replace. If pumps are exposed wrap them in heavy-duty plastic bags or shrink-wrap and secure with duct tape.

Remove your weather station. It wasn't designed for a hurricane. If your main controller or computer is in the pump house take steps to secure it and keep it dry. For computers disconnect, wrap in plastic and store in a safe place. Save data too. Turn off the main switch and secure the building. Shrink-wrap all controllers and then duct tape. Make sure they are secure to their base.

GOLF COURSE

Remove anything that can be blown around. Trash cans, tee markers, bunker rakes, flag poles, benches, ropes and stakes, tee signs, ball washers, directional signs etc. Don't think that the ►

divot sand bucket won't move...it will.

Drainage caps or grates. Drains don't work if they are covered with grass or other debris so remove the grates or caps. Heavy grates can be left nearby. Smaller or plastic caps should be secured with a sod staples or irrigation flags or simply taken to the shop. You might flag these openings too so no one walks or drives into the larger drains.

T.G.F.P.

"Thank God for Primo." Go ahead and spray that primo application. Double it if you need to. You'll be glad you did. Slowing the growth of your turf can be crucial when the turf is covered with debris.

Be ready for worms. Protect the greens but let the varmints eat the rough. It'll be easier to mow later. Trim any dangerous limbs before the storm hits. Those dead snags we leave for wildlife might not make it through the storm.

EXTRAS

I'm sure you or your staff will be called on to help in other areas. We

always are. Tennis windscreens should be rolled to the ground and secured. We used to roll up for the convenience of putting them back down. We learned the hard way; the extra weight at the top of the fence doesn't help in 125 mph winds.

Pool area or clubhouse grounds should be treated the same way as your shop. I'm not a fan of putting everything in the pool. Ever had to try getting it out? Chain or rope together and let the weight or bulk hold them down.

Remember to take the time for family in the event of a hurricane. Maybe start your preparations at home even sooner. Your family depends on you too.

In closing, the chance of a hurricane affecting our lives has increased dramatically. If you believe the hype, and insurance companies do, taking the early steps to prepare is critical. I've lived in Florida or coastal Carolina my entire life and never until 2004 been hit by a hurricane. Now three storms in the last two years. I hope it's a cycle that goes away soon.

But I'm more prepared now than ever. I can't stop them but I can be prepared. ■