

SPECIAL MAYOR'S MESSAGE ~ LESSONS FROM IRMA

We all know how very fortunate we are that Irma's path shifted east, saving our town from severe damage. The damage to our town was minimal. The Beach Station canopy was destroyed, several large trees were uprooted, debris littered the roads and in some cases blocked the roadway. Sporadic outages of electricity occurred, including the sewer lift station that transfers all sewage from town. Luckily, there was a very minimal storm surge that caused little beach erosion or damage. However, it was a good exercise in preparation and Irma has taught us a few lessons:

Every person living on the beaches should have an evacuation plan. The Pinellas County All Hazard Preparedness Guide, produced prior to storm season, is an excellent, comprehensive tool to help you plan for hurricane preparedness and an evacuation. These are available at Town Hall beginning June 1st (while supplies last) and it is always available online at: <http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/allhazardguide.htm>. A link is available on our website as well.

Get your Emergency Access Permit now. As the storm's path changed and it became a threat to our area, people inundated Town Hall to get their Emergency Access Permit. This surge of requests caused the Sheriff's Office computer system to crash, creating extended waits as permits were hand documented. These permits are available year round and do not expire. Once you have it, put it in a safe place with your other important papers in your hurricane kit or a fire/water proof safe.

Things can and DO change. When an evacuation is ordered by Pinellas County, timing and instructions may change as updated storm information becomes available. Changes will be announced via local news and the Pinellas County website. At the end of the evacuation time, when everyone must be off the island, NO ONE will be allowed back on the beaches until the order is lifted. Once the storm passes, the Sheriff's Office will assess the extent of damages and will determine when the bridges will be open for returning traffic. This would be announced thru the news.

Evacuate early. If you evacuate well before the storm (days) there should be gas and less traffic. Run from water and hide from wind. Storm surge is the most destructive and deadly part of a storm. Evacuate to high ground with friends, family or a hotel. In the event of a destructive storm we may lose power, water and sewer for days or months. Roads could be impassible and help may not be available. Mandatory evacuations are called to keep you safe and you should leave when ordered. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security.

After the storm, recovery takes time. Communication during a storm is very sporadic and challenging. Be aware that cell phones may not work and hard lines may be down. Restoring power to essential facilities (hospitals, health care facilities) and equipment (lift stations) is a priority. Duke Energy does their best to restore homes and businesses in a timely manner, but they have a long list of outages to deal with. Removing debris and restoring the roadways is also a priority as clean-up is essential to restoring normalcy to the town. Please be patient, remember all our neighboring towns have the same situation and it takes time to get necessary equipment and crew to make things look perfect again.

The sun comes out again. While a storm brings about chaos, it also brings out the good in many people. Neighbors come together to help one another, volunteers work in the heat to speed recovery and multiple governmental entities work together as one for the good of all. Thank you to citizens of the town that helped us – Ron Edwards, Corey Thornton, Carl Eckert and Todd Kmentt.

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Hurricane Myths

- **They (the government) will raise all the bridges so you can't leave.** FALSE – Bridges will be lowered down to prevent damage and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputies will stop traffic coming onto the beach.
- **Duke Energy will turn off the power.** POSSIBLE – Although Duke Energy did cut power during Hurricane Charley in 2004, they did not turn off the power during Hurricane Irma. Although this could happen if there was wide spread damage.
- **Town Hall is staffed during an evacuation.** FALSE – Staff is evacuated the same as residents and will return to town hall to answer phones and return calls once the order is lifted. Our staff also live in the storm path and have to ensure the safety of their homes and families.
- **The Town has the ability to turn the power off to certain sections of the town.** FALSE – The Town has no control over the power grid at all.
- **The Town would know if my home has power.** FALSE – The power could be on at your neighbor's house and off at yours. The Town has no way of knowing or determining.
- **The Pinellas County Sheriff's Emergency Access Permits are required to return to the town.** FALSE – The Emergency Access Permits only expedites re-entry. You can re-enter with your valid driver license or other valid photo ID.
- **Emergency Access Permit will allow you to return before the evacuation is lifted.** FALSE – The passes are used to expedite entry any time access is still being allowed. NO ONE will be allowed back after a storm until Pinellas County/Sheriff's Department lifts the order and opens the bridges.
- **You will be arrested if you do not evacuate.** FALSE - A person will not be arrested for staying after an evacuation order has been issued without mitigating circumstances. However, the evacuation is for your safety and the order should be followed.



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