

At sea, hurricanes are dangerous, but when they make landfall, the real problems begin.

The power of the winds and the severe rain can cause extensive damage to homes and other buildings. Shattered windows, blown-off siding and tiles, and water damage are common when a hurricane hits. The storm surge, or the heavy waves that accompany the storm, are behind the most extensive of damage.

Flooding, heavy winds, erosion, damaged property and even death can be left in the wake of these powerful storms. But having a plan of action and staying abreast of the problems can make hurricane season a lot easier to bear.

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce plays a pivotal role in terms of information dissemination before, during and after a hurricane.

In June, the beginning of the Atlantic hurricane season, the chamber organizes a hurricane forum. The forum features presentations by hurricane experts, including speakers from the Federal Emergency Management Association.

According to Charlie Clark, coordinator of media relations for the chamber, "the forum gives an overview of evacuation plans, what's new for the season and what (residents) can expect" in the event of a hurricane.

Clark said the seminar urges audiences to be prepared and informed in the event of a storm.

Though the Hilton Head area has not suffered a direct hit from a hurricane in more than 100 years, there is always the possibility of disaster.

In the event of a hurricane, the area has a number of people ready to leap into action when the warning goes out.

Jay Harter, the Town of Hilton Head Island's emergency management coordinator, is responsible for making the evacuation and eventual return to the community as smooth a transition as can be managed.

As soon as the governor gives the evacuation order, Harter and his team spring into action.

Firefighters, rescue and police personnel all are part of a group responsible for getting people off the island and heading for safety.

"We stay here until the last possible minute," Harter said. "Prior to leaving, we make sure facilities and generators are secure."

The first thing Harter does after the evacuation order is to set up a base camp for all emergency operations related to the storm.

"We are located in one central location – sort of a resource for personnel and equipment,"

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