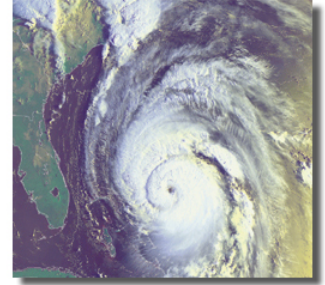


Disasters and Sustainability

Earlier this month, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center revised its total number of expected named storms and hurricanes from its May 2008 predictions.



The updated outlook forecasts 14 to 18 named storms, up from 12 to 16 named storms, with three to six major hurricanes of Category 3 strength or higher expected. These ranges encompass the entire season, which ends Nov. 30, and include the five storms that have formed thus far.

North Carolina is no stranger to hurricanes. Since 1998, North Carolina has experienced six hurricanes: Bonnie (1998-Cat. 3); Floyd (1999-Cat. 4); Isabel (2003-Cat. 5); Alex (2004-Cat. 3); Charley (2004-Cat. 4); and Ophelia (2005-Cat. 1).*

Hurricanes and other disasters will occur; how we plan for and respond to them is up to us.

One way to minimize the impact of disasters and contribute to a more sustainable community is to become involved with local land-use planning and zoning. By keeping development out of flood-prone areas and lending a voice to zoning regulations for new and existing structures, you can help protect susceptible areas from damage and ensure future structures are more resistant to damage from disasters.

Closer to home, monitor and reduce the amount of household hazardous waste on hand, remove trees that can easily fall during a storm, store or tie down outdoor furniture/toys that can get loose and cause damage, or retrofit homes to better survive a disaster.

After a disaster, such as a hurricane, people and communities move into a response mode. Search and rescue, as well as the protection of property, are generally the first phases of response. Subsequent response efforts usually involve cleanup and rebuilding. Debris of all kinds is generated during cleanup/rebuilding. Communities and individuals both should determine the feasibility of recycling, reusing or handling materials in some means other than landfills, burning or a similar disposal method, while still protecting public health. Some materials may cause significant environmental damage and require handling with specialized training and equipment. Local governments should be the first point of contact when dealing with disaster debris.

Sustaining your family's wellbeing should be a first step. Develop and practice an emergency plan. Practicing the plan gives you an opportunity to think about more sustainable ways of ensuring your safety and accumulating the supplies you need during an emergency period.

* State Climate Office of North Carolina.