

How Charlotte County responded to Hurricane Idalia

By Hector Flores

While we were spared from Hurricane Idalia's worst impacts, Charlotte County did see localized flooding, which caused some damage to homes and businesses. Flooding in downtown Punta Gorda and on Beach Road in Englewood forced the closures of the U.S. 41 bridges and the Beach Road causeway to Manasota Key until Wednesday evening.

Our Emergency Operation Center went to a Level 1 activation in response to the storm. Fire & EMS crews responded to assist residents whose homes were flooded and motorists stalled on flooded roads. Public Works crews assisted the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office addressing debris and floodwater impacts on numerous roadways.

Staff from the Human Services Department, other departments and volunteers from our Community Emergency Response Team handled hundreds of inquiries made to our call center around the clock, sharing information about the storm, evacuations (none were ordered), the refuge site and more.

The Joint Information Center compiled some helpful tips for dealing with flooded homes. For starters, homeowners should take photos or videos of damaged property and keep records of any expenses. Contact your insurance company to determine what kind of coverage you have. Keep in mind most home insurance policies do not cover flooding, which requires a separate flood insurance policy.

The Utilities Department crews worked on restoring power to lift stations and ensuring there were no disruptions to potable water supplies. **The Community Services Department stood up and operated a refuge site at Centennial Park recreation center as an option for residents concerned about their safety during the storm.**

One of the biggest risks for homes that have been flooded is mold. Remove anything that has gotten wet, such as mattresses, carpeting, carpet padding, rugs, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, books, wall coverings, and most paper products.

The Community Development Department has launched an online Self-Reporting Storm Damage system to help us collect damage assessments. Visit www.tinyurl.com/reportingdamage, enter your address, select the type of damage and add a photo.

Reporting damage in this system gets the information to county departments quickly and eliminates the need to call it in. The information will help the county compile an extensive list of the damage caused by Hurricane Idalia.

Having received four inches of more of rain over a 24-hour period, many areas still have standing water in swales and elsewhere. Please keep children and pets out of any standing water as it may contain pollutants, such as pet waste, bacteria and vehicle fluids.

Most county offices opened Thursday, including constitutional officers. For operational hours for specific departments and agencies, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

County parks and preserves will be undergoing assessment Thursday. Residents and visitors should be aware of potentially dangerous conditions and are urged to use caution when using these facilities.

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