

Hurricane Michael: Why It Might Be The Worst

The 2018 hurricane season apparently isn't over yet, with Hurricane Michael making landfall in the Florida panhandle.

Michael, a freak storm, has not followed in the path of other hurricanes, but is writing its own story, one that will go down in the history books. Having entered the Gulf of Mexico as a tropical storm, this Category 4 hurricane has turned north, aiming for the panhandle of Florida, an area where no other Category 4 hurricane has ever made landfall.

Apparently the hurricane's growth has been fueled by unusually warm water in the Gulf, bringing the maximum winds of this monster up to 145 miles per hour. That's strong enough to cause structural damage to buildings, according to the National Hurricane Center. The storm surge, as the hurricane makes landfall, is expected to reach 14 feet in some areas. Storm surge can be the most destructive part of any hurricane, and considering the lowlands, with many waterways, where this hurricane is coming ashore, chances are very high that many homes will be totally destroyed or even washed away.

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Officials are working to motivate people to evacuate in 22 counties that are in the storm's path. But officials are concerned that people won't follow their evacuation orders, as evacuation is purely voluntary. As with many similar situations in the past, there will be people who shelter in place, expecting to ride it out. But Tyndall Air Force Base, just south of Panama City has evacuated all but essential personnel, moving all of their aircraft, including F-22 Raptors, farther inland.

At this point in time, it is too late for people along the shore to evacuate. But those farther inland still have a chance. With the immense power of this hurricane, there is a strong chance that it will sustain hurricane-force winds all the way into Georgia. With a projected path that takes in much of the Eastern Seaboard, dumping up to a foot of rain in most places, the overall damage from Hurricane Michael could end up being enormous.

While not directly in the storm's path, rainfall from the hurricane could reach into Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky. The current storm track, from the National Hurricane Center shows the possibility of the storm reaching as far north as Virginia, Maryland and possibly even Delaware.

Preparing for the Worst

Of all the natural disasters that we face in our country, hurricanes, especially the higher category ones, are the most devastating. The amazing power of these storms makes nuclear weapons seem weak by comparison.

In fact, the energy expended by a hurricane can equal 10,000 nuclear bombs, according to NASA. This is obviously not something to be taken lightly, especially by those who live close to the Gulf. The sheer destructive power of a hurricane this size, makes it extremely dangerous for those who are planning on hunkering down and sheltering in place.

So, what should you do, if you live in the path of a major hurricane like this? The first thing you have to do is make a decision as to whether you are going to shelter in place or bug out.

This must be a logical decision, not an emotional one, and it has to take into account all the relevant factors, such as:

- The strength of the storm

- How close the storm is projected to pass over where you live
- How high above sea level your home is
- How hurricane resistant your home is
- Whether you have enough time to evacuate

If you're going to shelter in place, make sure to let family members who are outside the area know what you are planning on doing, so that they can give your name and address to authorities if they don't hear from you. That one step could speed your rescue, if your area ends up flooding or your home becomes destroyed.

You should do what you can to prepare your home, in order to minimize the potential for damage. This includes covering the windows with plywood. As the storm travels past, the local wind direction can change, because hurricanes turn in a counterclockwise direction. So don't think you can just cover the windows on one side of your home. It is possible that the winds could carry objects towards your home from just about any direction.

Speaking of those objects, clear up and put away anything on your property that the winds could pick up and turn into a projectile. Children's toys, yard furniture, gardening tools and even barbecue pits can all be hurled around by the winds, especially with a Category 4 hurricane like Michael. Take a good look at the trees around your home. Hurricanes will break weak branches off of trees, especially branches that are mostly horizontal, rather than vertical. If there are any branches which overhang the roof of your home and you can cut them down before the hurricane hits, you should do so to protect your home's roof from damage.

The next problem to concern yourself with is that of flooding. Hurricanes produce two different types of flooding; storm surge and flash flooding.

Storm surge is water from the ocean, or in this case from the

Gulf of Mexico, which is pushed up by the storm, creating what is essentially a very high tide. There is little that can usually be done about it, unless you have the ability to build a dike or sandbag wall around your home. How badly it can affect you depends on how high your home is above sea level.

Flash flooding, which isn't always quick as the name implies, is flooding caused by rainfall. This can occur anywhere along the storm's track, and is more likely to occur in low-lying areas. Perhaps one of the worst possible areas for flash flooding is in a valley at the foot of the mountains, as the runoff from the mountains adds to the rain falling in the valley. Most flash flooding is low-level flooding, although it can be worse. Preparing for low-level flooding is fairly easy, as in many cases a few sandbags blocking the doors is enough. If you don't have sandbags available, you can use 13 gallon kitchen garbage bags, the kind with tie handles. Fill them partially full of water, and then hang their handles from the doorknob or hooks set into the doorframe, to hold the bags in place. They will effectively block water from coming in, up to the level of the water in the bags.

Finally, the other thing you should do to prepare your home is to keep track of the weather and news reports, so that you know what is happening. Hurricanes can be unpredictable, changing course, gaining or losing intensity and even stopping over an area for an extended time. You need to know what is happening, so that you can decide how to react.

Make Sure You're Ready for the Long-Haul

Surviving the hurricane itself is usually the easy part.

There's really not much you can do, once you prepare, except to hunker down and try to relax, keeping one eye on your home

and the other on the news. The only active thing you might find yourself doing is moving things upstairs, to protect them from potential flooding. That is, unless your home floods and you have to evacuate.

We've all seen pictures of the Cajun Navy rescuing people from the flooding in Louisiana and Houston. Their help has been invaluable in saving countless lives through more storms than we know. But you don't necessarily need to wait for the help of those volunteers if your home does flood. All you need is an inflatable rubber raft, and you can rescue yourself. Hopefully things won't come to that, but it's an easy prep to put in place and doesn't even have to cost a lot. You can buy a rubber raft for as little as \$100 or so and be able to rescue yourself. Just make sure it is big enough for your family.

Assuming your home doesn't flood or suffer any major damage from the hurricane, your problems will be far from over. The bigger survival problem for most people isn't surviving the storm itself, but rather, surviving the aftermath. Chances are, the hurricane will down power lines, disrupt supply lines and cause damage to the very stores which you and I need to get supplies from. If that's the case, we will have trouble getting the things we need.

We saw the same things happen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. In both cases, there were areas where electric power wasn't restored for six weeks. Stores and restaurants were closed. People were searching in dumpsters, to find something to eat. This is not unusual, as it takes time to restore services and reopen businesses after a major storm.

Anyone in the path of Hurricane Michael has to expect the same, no matter how far inland they might be. You can't hope for the best in these situations, you have to plan for the worst. The projected storm track for Michael covers so much

territory, that restoring services is going to be a major undertaking. This means being prepared to be self-sufficient for at least a month. You've got to have enough food, water and other basic supplies in place. You'll also need to have a means of cooking and heating your home, especially if another storm comes in. Surviving the aftermath of the hurricane is a true exercise in self-sufficiency, as there is no way of knowing how bad things will be or how long it will take them to return to normal.

For some, there probably won't be a return to normal, just like with Katrina. Those people will end up having to start over, either in the same place or moving somewhere else. They, more than anyone else, need our prayers.



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