Most areas of the United States experience four seasons, but in the Greater New Orleans area, there’s only one season that counts: June 1-Nov. 30.

During those six months of what every kindergartner knows as “hurricane season,” all bets are off. Meteorologists (see WWL-TV’s Chris Franklin below) might call for an “average” number of named storms, but they recognize the stark reality that it takes only one hurricane in topographically challenged New Orleans to change lives forever.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans considers itself an “early responder” and a “forever responder” in times of peril, providing long-term support to persons in need. Here are some tips and reflections on how to best prepare yourselves and your family during the hurricane season as well as steps the archdiocese takes to respond to the victims of disasters.

Can we predict the path? Yes Can we predict the intensity? No

Chris Franklin
WWL-TV meteorologist
St. Catherine of Siena Parish
Metairie

What’s the long-range forecast for the 2019 hurricane season?

Everything is pointing to a near-average season. The big prediction everyone talks about comes from Colorado State, and they’re calling for 13 named storms, five hurricanes and two major hurricanes, which means Category 3, 4 or 5. Of course, as we know, it only takes one storm to pick things up.

Have hurricane forecasts improved in recent years through better science and better data?

If you’re looking at the seasonal outlooks, they haven’t gotten much better or worse. They’ve stayed about the same. But what has improved tremendously is the ability to forecast the track. We’ve seen the error margin of those forecast trajectories shrink a little bit. We’re a lot more accurate as to where the storms will go. There still needs to be a lot of work on predicting the intensity of the storms. Hurricane Michael (in 2018) was forecast to be a Category 1 making landfall, and it was actually a Category 5. But the forecast landfall was fairly accurate – it always was looking like the Florida panhandle.

Why the difference between forecasting path vs. forecasting intensity?

It all comes down to the overall weather that steers and guides tropical systems. It’s just a little bit easier to forecast as opposed to the actual mechanisms and the minute changes in storms that are almost impossible to observe in real time and can drastically weaken or strengthen a storm. The steering currents around a hurricane are easier to track, so the path is more accurate.

What does that mean for New Orleans?

If New Orleans is in the crosshairs – even if it’s looking like a Category 1 – we need to be prepared, in the back of our minds, to evacuate. We just can’t trust and rely that it’s only going to be a Category 1. These can really blow up or weaken. Florence, along the North Carolina coast, weakened rapidly (in 2018). They anticipated a Category 5, and it was a Category 1.

Is there any cutting edge science coming that will make forecasts more accurate?

They’re actually discussing the possible use of drones to monitor storms. Right now, the hurricane hunter airplanes drop instruments into the storm. Computer models always work better when they have as much data as possible. Drones might be able to collect more information. Chris Franklin and his wife are parishioners of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Metairie, where their daughter attends school.

The following tips come from Cheryl Harper, regional manager for Catholic Mutual Group, the leading provider of property, liability and employee benefit coverage and related services for the Catholic Church in the North America.

1. Gather your important documents for you and all family members, such as birth certificates, passports, credit cards and all account numbers and passwords, insurances, wills, regular bills, etc. You can also take pictures of these documents on your smart phone as a backup and email them to yourself so you have them in two different places.

2. Take any prescription medications with you and keep renewal information handy (such as doctor’s name and contact number). Remember your glasses and contacts.

3. Make sure all important computer files are backed up so they are not lost. “I have everything backed up on the cloud,” Harper said.

4. Using your smart phone, video your home, room by room, closet by closet, to document your possessions, so in case of a disaster, you can prove what you had for insurance reimbursement.

5. Take with you jewelry, a first-aid kit, safe-deposit box keys and any heirloom items that may have been passed down or have important or special personal meaning. Take your photographs and photo albums in plastic bags. Remember charging cords for your computer and phone.

6. Establish an emergency call list and update it regularly, especially before hurricane season so your relatives and coworkers know how to contact you and you know how to contact them.

7. Think about your home and property. Trim tree branches and limbs back away from your home or roof. Clean your storm drains of leaves, trash or grass so water will drain. Bring any objects that could become projectiles in a storm inside a garage or home.

8. Review and reassess home insurance coverage and base this on the current value of your home. Pay special attention to the named storm deductibles.

9. If you plan to evacuate, perform basic car maintenance (fill up car with gas, check fluid levels, tire pressure), clean out your refrigerator and freezer, shut off water, unplug appliances and electronics such as televisions and computers. It is recommended – starting at the beginning of hurricane season in June – to keep items in refrigerator/freezer to a minimum, so there is less spoilage to worry about when leaving.

10. Take at least three days’ worth of non-perishable food, water (a gallon a day per person is recommended) and clothing and personal hygiene items for every member of your family, since you might not know where you will land. Don’t forget a can opener and moist towelettes.

A printable version of a checklist for businesses and families prepared by FEMA is available at: https://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit.

From a helicopter in 2010, Archbishop Gregory Aymond surveyed the Louisiana coastline devastated by BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

CHRIS FRANKLIN

A personal Top 10 checklist when evacuating for a disaster

In 2010, Archbishop Gregory Aymond surveyed the Louisiana coastline devastated by BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill.
By Peter Finney Jr.  Clarion Herald

One of the important lessons Catholic Charities of New Orleans learned from recent natural, engineering and environmental disasters – Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, Hurricane Gustav in 2008, BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 and Hurricane Isaac in 2012 – was the need to increase its marketing (multiplying its marketing and communication recovery resources.)

“Disaster management coordinator (Gregory) Aymond likes to say we are playing multiple games and the forever responders,” said Tom Costanza, division director of Catholic Charities.

After the BP oil spill in 2010, the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which is part of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, also collaborated with its parishes to provide immediate help in the affected areas. Costanza said, “We have a plan where we will be doing things that can not be tabulated (communications) with the City of New Orleans.

Catholic Charities discovered after Katrina the importance of visibility and quick response following a disaster, even though in previous decades it was known more for its long-term efforts. After recent disasters, many Americans have changed their views on Catholic Charities, and the organization has grown in response. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, Catholic Charities of New Orleans opened the Hurricane Recovery Center, a temporary facility that provided services to those affected by the storm. The center was designed to help people get back on their feet after the disaster, and it offered services such as food, shelter, and counseling. Catholic Charities has also worked to improve its communication efforts, both internally and externally, to ensure that it can respond quickly and effectively to future disasters.

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