

# HURRICANE AND TROPICAL STORM DEPARTMENTAL ACTION PLAN

*Department of Communication*

*College of Charleston*

*Approved: December 2007;*

*Revised: June 2009; June 2010; September 2010; September 2018*



This departmental document summarizes current Department of Communication procedures for coping with hurricanes and tropical storms. Information about College of Charleston procedures for all emergencies, including those caused by hurricanes and tropical storms, is available at <https://emergency.cofc.edu/>. All Department of Communication employees should give careful attention to the hurricane preparedness information available at this site.

Should any procedure described or statement made in this departmental document conflict with institutional policies or directives of institutional or school administrators, those policies or directives shall supersede the procedures and statements contained in this departmental document.

This document is designed for faculty and staff of the Department of Communication. Department of Communication students and parents should refer to the information available at <https://emergency.cofc.edu/>.

## 1.0 Priorities for Hurricane and Tropical Storm Preparation

The following statements shall provide general guidance for Department of Communication faculty and staff in preparing for possible hurricane and tropical storm events affecting the Charleston region.

1.1 No faculty or staff member of the Department of Communication is “essential personnel” as defined by the College of Charleston Office of Emergency Management. Faculty and staff members should not remain on campus if campus is evacuated. In such cases, all departmental employees should see to their own safety and are not expected to concern themselves with campus buildings or property. Faculty and staff members should attend to the directions of College of Charleston administrators, the College’s Emergency Management Team, the department chair, or other appropriate supervisory or campus safety personnel.

1.2 In preparing for weather incidents, all departmental faculty and staff who are on campus during normal business hours are expected to assist with weather preparations if the campus has not been closed or an evacuation notice given. Weather preparation is NOT the sole responsibility of the department chair and the office staff. However, the paramount concern of the Department of Communication in hurricane and tropical storm preparation is the protection of human life and safety. Departmental employees are not expected to take any measures or steps to protect departmental buildings or property if a reasonable person would conclude that such measures might pose a significant and imminent risk to life and safety.

1.3 Departmental employees always should supply current contact information, including cell numbers, to the department when those numbers change. Employees should review this information for accuracy before a critical weather event and should supply the departmental with any non-institutional email addresses that might be used during or after a weather event. Faculty and staff members are reminded that a severe weather event might make cell phones with local area codes unusable in the days following the storm.

1.4 The department is not responsible for the protection of the private property of individual faculty and staff members when such property has been left in departmental offices, storage rooms, closets, conference rooms, or institutional classrooms. Faculty and staff members are responsible for the removal or protection of their private property.

1.5 When campus is evacuated in anticipation of a hurricane or tropical storm, faculty and staff are encouraged to leave messages to this effect on voicemail and using email auto-reply features. However, faculty and staff are reminded that power outages and service disruptions may prevent callers and email users from gaining access to these messages.

1.6 The department has offices and facilities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings in flood-prone areas of Charleston. Faculty and staff should assume that roofs, windows, and exterior doors will leak during any significant weather event. During a severe weather event, faculty and staff with ground-level offices should expect flooding to at least three feet in their offices and should plan accordingly in moving equipment and belongings to more secure areas.

1.7 If the Charleston region experiences a voluntary or mandatory evacuation, faculty and staff are encouraged, but not required, to take their laptop computers and/or data storage devices with them as they evacuate. Reasonable steps must be taken to maintain the security of all campus property taken from campus. Vital student data or records should not be removed from campus without consulting the department chair or associate chair on privacy and security issues. Departmental faculty and staff are encouraged to supply information about their evacuation plans, including evacuation destinations, to the department prior to evacuation.

1.8 Prior to leaving campus, faculty and staff should attempt to back up their data to the College of Charleston's Microsoft Office 365 or other password-protected online data storage.

1.9 When a hurricane or tropical storm is anticipated, the department will make available plastic trash bags and/or plastic sheeting, which should be used to protect computers, computer equipment, and other electronic equipment. If possible, computers and other devices with critical data should be completely sealed in watertight plastic bags or containers. If time is limited, electronic data and the devices storing those data should be given the highest level of protection, followed by provisions to protect the department's most expensive electronic equipment (e.g., individual items with replacement costs exceeding \$1,000 per item).

1.10 If time permits and the department chair or the associate chair concludes that the risk of flooding is high, all available and able departmental faculty and staff will be asked to assist in moving computer equipment from ground-level computer labs and offices assigned to the department. This equipment should be moved to a second-floor conference room, covered in plastic and placed as far away from windows and exterior doors as is practical.

1.11 If time is limited and other options are not available, faculty and staff members are welcome to make minor purchases (under \$30) of plastic bags, containers, and other equipment to be used for the protection of university property. Receipts are required for reimbursement.

1.12 Any exterior furniture on piazzas or porches should be secured by departmental staff.

1.13 Faculty will contact students in their courses regarding adjustments to course schedule (e.g. postpone exams, adjust assignment due dates, etc.) and plan for communication after the event (e.g. OAKS, webpage, email, etc.).

1.14 As part of any course with a journalism, digital media, and/or public relations emphasis, students should not be assigned any weather-related project that a reasonable person might conclude would encourage students to subject themselves to unwarranted risks posed by exposure to the effects of a hurricane or tropical storm. This departmental procedure does not relieve College of Charleston students from their responsibility to act reasonably and prudently in protecting their own lives and health.

## **2.0 During the Weather Event**

Departmental faculty and staff members should not remain on or come to campus during any hurricane or tropical storm or when the campus has been closed for weather-related reasons or an evacuation order given.

## **3.0 Following a Hurricane or Tropical Storm**

3.1 Once the campus has been closed, departmental employees should return to campus following a hurricane or tropical storm only when the campus has been reopened and all employees given permission to come to work. No departmental faculty or staff member is considered “essential personnel” as defined by the College of Charleston Emergency Management Team. Departmental employees should not come to campus when only essential personnel are to be present on campus.

3.2 Following the return to campus, departmental faculty and staff should notify the department chair (or other designated administrator) of any weather-related problems or damage in departmental offices, conference rooms, storage areas, or institutional classrooms. The department chair (or other designated administrator) should be notified of any computer or other electronic equipment requiring repair following a weather event, even if a Helpdesk or other repair request already has been submitted.

3.3 Students should never be encouraged to return to campus by a departmental employee unless and until campus has been reopened to students by the applicable College of Charleston administrator.

3.4 If departmental buildings have been compromised or equipment damaged, prompt reports of this damage should be made to the department’s office manager. Unrepaired damages that will impair the teaching and research missions of the department should be discussed with the department chair or the associate chair.

#### **4.0 Emergency Contact Information**

4.1 Prior to, during, and following any hurricane or tropic storm, the department chair will carry an institutional cell phone and a personal cell phone. The numbers for both phones ordinarily will be provided to all departmental faculty and staff. Following an extreme weather event, faculty and staff are expected to contact the chair to notify him/her if weather-related issues will prevent a safe and timely return to campus when the College has been reopened.

4.2 To the fullest extent possible, faculty and staff are encouraged to look for updates via Cougar Alert and College of Charleston social media outlets on a regular basis during and after any weather event. The department chair should be notified if any issues will prevent faculty or staff compliance with any weather-related announcements from these outlets.

#### **5.0 Procedure Review and Revision**

This document shall be reviewed and, if necessary, updated on a regular basis. This document is subject to change without notice. The department chair is responsible for the interpretation and application of this document.