THE SHRIMP BOAT OWNER'S GUIDE TO Hurricane Preparedness AT THE PORT OF PALACIOS

Preparation Can Reduce the Loss of Property and Lives

The Texas Gulf Coast is particularly at risk should a hurricane strike. Because of the generally low-lying terrain, access to evacuation routes (either road or waterway) may be closed by abnormally high tides well before the storm's eye arrives over land. Saving lives and protecting property should be of prime concern when the mid-coast area is faced with the prospect of potentially devastating tropical weather. Remember, it isn't a question of will we have another hurricane, it is only a matter of when!

The best preparation for yourself and your family is a well-developed plan. A "written" hurricane plan is recommended, complete with checklists and evacuation routes from the Port of Palacios, your home or workplace. Your spouse, children, parents, other dependents and/or crew should be part of and familiar with your plan. Everyone needs to know what is expected of them and when it must be done.

In addition to human safety, there is a critical need to protect the main item you use to generate your income — your fishing boat. The following is a guide to help you develop a hurricane plan to safeguard your vessel. Other references, from such sources as the American Red Cross, National Weather Service, U.S. Coast Guard, insurance companies or Matagorda County emergency management coordinator, may also prove useful in self-directed efforts to prevent or minimize the detrimental impacts of a hurricane to you, your family and your property. A telephone directory of potential sources in included on page 5.

Facts

- An evacuation cannot be ordered in Texas — it can only be recommended at the local level by the county judge or at the regional or state level by the governor. The individual boat owner is ultimately responsible for deciding if an evacuation is necessary, what measures should be taken to protect yourself, your family and crew, and your property as well as that of others.
- The commercial shrimp boat population of Texas, particularly along the mid-coast region, has grown dramatically since the last major storm hit this part of the coast (Carla, 1961). The increase in vessels alone may accentuate the need to act early when making preparations and/or evacuating.
- The increased number of boats may mean that sheltered relocation/evacuation sites traditionally used to weather the storm may be overcrowded (i.e., Tres Palacios and Colorado Rivers, or the Victoria Barge Canal). This could pose new dangers en route or at the final destination selected for moorage or anchorage during the storm. Overcrowding within the port itself could create a level of risk that was unknown in the past.
- Not only has the number of shrimp boats increased since 1961 (i.e., Hurricane Carla), the size of many Gulf boats has increased dramatically. An increased draft or rigging elevation (i.e., waterline to top of the outriggers or wheel house) may hamper passage upstream to a safe haven due to insufficient bottom clearance or the inability to clear bridges, power lines or pipeline crossings. It is expected that high tides would compound this problem. Current vertical bridge clearances at mean high tide are as follows:
  - St. Hwy 521 at the Tres Palacios River — 14.2 feet (Source: TxDOT*)
  - St. Hwy 521 at the Colorado River — 38 feet (Source: TxDOT)
  - St. Hwy 35 at the Victoria Barge Canal — 50.7 feet (Source: TxDOT)
- According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the locks of the Colorado River are chained in the open position whenever a hurricane watch is issued for

*TxDOT: Texas Department of Transportation

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the area and remain open until the storm has passed to allow free access in and out of the river where it meets the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW).

- Most of the land adjacent to waterways in Texas (i.e., rivers, canals, channels, etc.) is privately owned. Boat owners and crew members delivering a vessel upstream should be aware that they may be trespassing if they decide to cross these lands without permission before, during or after a storm.
- Should a storm threaten the vicinity, the swing bridges on the GIWW at Sargent and Matagorda will either be locked, or sunk, in the open position to allow vessel passage along this waterway (Source: TxDOT). However, it may be advisable to check with Texas Department of Transportation officials first to see if the canal is passable at those locations before leaving port.
- Extraordinary high tides, floating debris and/or missing markers along the GIWW, all prospective results of a storm, may obscure a mariner's ability to navigate safely within the confines of the maintained channel of the GIWW.
- Inaccessible roads or prohibited re-entry by authorities for public safety reasons may prevent owners from checking on their boats for extended periods following a storm.
- Measures to protect an untrailerable boat should begin at least 72 hours in advance of a storm. Port evacuation should begin no later than 24 hours before a storm's predicted landfall.
- High profile vehicles, such as a boat on a trailer, will not be allowed on highways or bridges once winds reach the point considered potentially dangerous by public officials.
- You could be held personally liable if a boat remains in port and subsequently damages a neighboring boat, shoreside facility or waterfront property.
- If the storm should cause your boat to block a navigable waterway or entrance to a port turning basin, thus creating an impasse or danger to other boaters, USCG or port officials may require you to take immediate steps to remove your boat. Should you be unable or unwilling to do so promptly, they may decide to have it removed, and will hire a contractor who may bill you directly for the cost of this work.
- Following a storm, salvage or repair crews may be tied up with other work and be unable to assist in promptly restoring your boat to fishing condition or the port to operational service.

Preparations

- A hurricane could prevent, or noticeably restrict, not only immediate, but future shrimping activities as well. Therefore, plans and preparations might also include provisions for covering the day-to-day needs of your family until income resumes. Ensure that such essential needs as food, shelter or special medical care are included.
- If you plan to travel during hurricane season, have a knowledgeable friend ready to execute your hurricane plan for your boat. Provide both this individual and the harbor master with primary and alternative emergency phone numbers. Do as much of the pre-storm preparation yourself before leaving so only last minute details will remain.
- Insurance can be critically important, therefore:
  - Know where your insurance papers are located.
  - Make sure your policy is current and in force.
  - Know what it does and does not cover.
  - Know your responsibilities.
  - Know your insurance agent's responsibilities.
- Photo documentation could prove to be a valuable asset when settling insurance claims. Photograph or videotape your boat inside and out, both before and after a storm. Include all electronics, appliances, nets, winches, rigging and hardware. Put these photos or tapes and your boat documents and insurance papers in a safe place.
- Documentation and/or registration papers should normally be kept aboard the vessel. However, it may be best to remove originals for safe storage prior to a storm and replace them with photocopies so, if requested, ownership can be verified by authorities.
- If you will be evacuating and taking your boat to a more sheltered site in a river or canal, attempt to obtain the adjacent landowners permission before crossing the property, or plan to depart and board your boat at public access sites.
- Get your supplies and preparation equipment ready well in advance. This could include, but is not limited to:
  - Mooring and anchor lines
  - Fenders and/or chafing gear
  - Small lines and cable ties for lashing down
  - Portable radios (especially weather units), telephones, and flashlights, each with fresh batteries
- Remove or lash down equipment or items that are exposed to high winds and/or water.
- Duct tape hatches, windows and doors. High winds can easily blow water through openings that normally do not permit moisture to pass through.
- Locate all through-hull fittings. Test seacocks for opening and shutting.
- With the high stakes involved, do not hesitate to call on professionals who deal with hurricane preparedness or emergency response for advice or assistance (i.e., Red Cross personnel, insurance agents, U.S. Coast Guard marine safety officers, salvagers, etc.).

Options

Because storms and their impacts are unpredictable, decisions regarding the security of your boat, home and family can never be made with a full guarantee they will produce satisfactory outcomes. However, it is always best to make such deliberations while there is time to review the situation and carefully evaluate the alternatives. The following sections are suggestions that the individual should consider as he or she determines how to best safeguard a boat, reduce the risk of damaging other boats, shoreside facilities or port features, and protect lives.

Move the Boat Inland

The first option is to remove the boat from the main thrust of the storm surge. A stream (i.e., river, bayou or creek) or a manmade waterway (i.e. barge canal or ship channel) that is sufficiently navigable and runs inland from the coast a distance you personally consider adequate may offer safer refuge during the storm. Plans to evacuate the port and relocate should be executed well in advance of the storm's predicted landfall (possibly up to 24 or more hours before). Again, remember that high tides may prevent what is usually an easy clearance of bridges, power lines or pipelines that cross the waterway you select as your evacuation route and make navigation within the confines of charted channels, such as the GIWW, difficult. Also, high profile boats on trailers will be removed from public roads by law enforcement officers when the winds reach a critical level.

Secure the Boat in Port

Properly tying up a boat in the harbor could reduce (although not eliminate) risks to boats, docks, bulkheads and other adjacent properties. It must be done with care and forethought, however. Boat owners choosing to use one of the port turning basins for a safe haven should check with the Palacios harbor master (a.k.a. general manager for Matagorda County Navigation District No. One) or USCG personnel for their recommendations on securing a vessel before a storm arrives. All mooring lines should be checked for wear as well as adequate size and strength. Check all cleats and backing plates, as well as the structure (i.e. pier, dock, boat) to which they are attached, to determine if they will withstand the forces of the storm. Take into account that the storm surge could reach 10 to 20 feet or more, which is much higher than the grounds adjacent to the docks and bulkheads found in any of Palacios' three turning basins.

Anchor in the Bay

Such open water anchorage may reduce certain risks posed by in-port moorage, such as battering other boats, bulkheads, etc., or being battered by neighboring boats or debris (floating or flying). Such anchorage would likely require multiple anchors with anchor lines of sufficient size, strength and length (in calm to moderate seas a minimum of 5 to 7 feet of line for each foot of water depth is recommended, in rough seas more may be needed). Depending on the eye location and the distinct characteristics of the storm, tides could vary from extremely high to extraordinarily low. So consider the prospective depth when selecting an anchorage site, setting anchors and deploying anchor lines.

Out-run or Out-maneuver the Storm

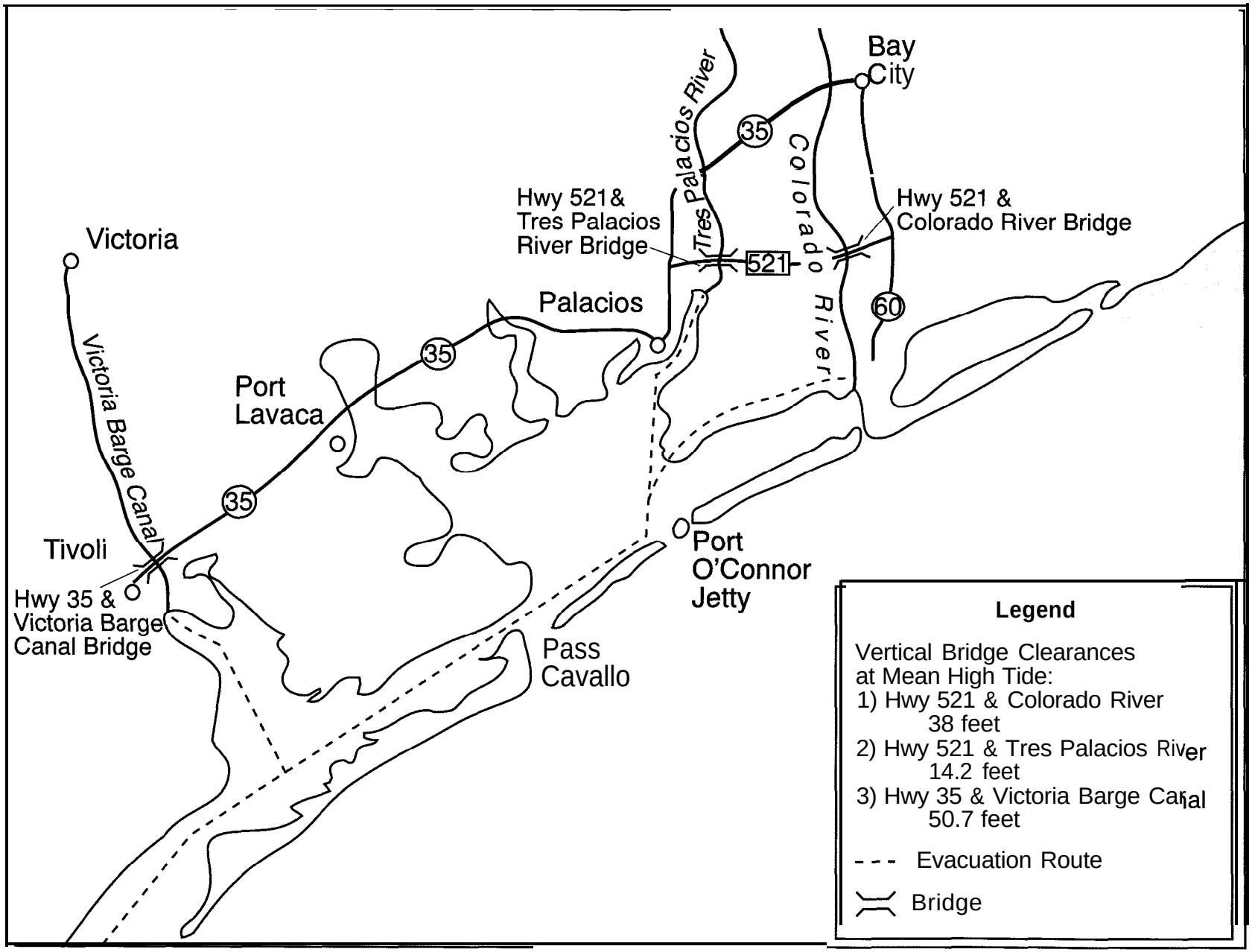
Although professional forecasters will use all the knowledge and expertise they possess to predict the path of a storm and its point of expected landfall, such efforts still represent an inexact science. Gulf hurricanes can be, and often are, fickle and unpredictable. Therefore, those who try to out-guess, out-run and out-maneuver a storm are betting that their luck won't run out.

Unfortunately, there are always those foolish enough to tempt fate, and in doing so, risk their lives and that of their accompanying crew members. It is never recommended that anyone remain on board a boat during a major storm, the risks are just too great!

REMEMBER:

YOU ARE THE ONE WHO IS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR HURRICANE PLANNING AND PREPARATION. START EARLY, BE THOROUGH AND ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION !

Waterway Evacuation Route Options



Index

Division of Emergency Manage4ment, Austin	.512/451-2291
24-Hour Emergency	.512/424-2444
Governor's Division of Emergency Management,Austin	.512/424-2453
	512/424-2454
Texas Department of Transportation - Yoakum District	.512/293-4347
U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office - Corpus Christi..	.512/888-3180
U.S. Coast Guard Station - Port O'Connor	.512/983-2617
	512/983-2616
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Galveston District..	.409/766-3899
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Matagorda Locks	.409/863-7842
American Red Cross - Bay City Office..	.409/245-3056
Matagorda County Emergency Management Coordinator - Bay City	.409/245-4100
Texas Department of Transportation - Matagorda Swing Bridge..	.409/863-7834
Texas Department of Transportation - Sargent Swing Bridge..	.409/245-4789
National Weather Service - Alvin	

Emergency Communications

KIOX - FM 95.7	409/245-4642
KMKS - FM 102.5	409/244-4242
KXGJ - FM 101.7..	409/244-5945
LCRA Weather Radio Station FM 162.425 on 7 channel weather radio..	
NOAA Weather Radio	

Emergency Medical Services

Matagorda General Hospital - Bay City	800/547-6383 or
	409/245-6383
Wagner General Hospital - Palacios	512/972-2511
Memorial Medical Center - Port Lavaca	.512/552-6713
Matagorda County EMS - Palacios	.512/972-2121
Harbor Master - Port of Palacios	.512/972-5556
Harbor Master, Port of Bay City - Matagorda Harbor	.409/863-2103
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary (1234) - Palacios (John Conner)	.512/972-3858

Oil Spill Response

Clean Harbors, Inc. - Palacios (Terry Mosier)	.512/972-2853
	Pager 512/503-1012
	Mobile 512/550-1937
Texas General Land Office - Austin	.800 / 832-8224
U.S. Coast Guard - Nationwide (Boating Safety)	.800/368-5647
Texas Railroad Commission (pipeline or chemical spills only) - Austin	.800/832-8224
Victoria County Navigation District - Munson Smith	.512/573-9191
Consulting Engineer - Billy Settles	.512/575-0474
U.S. Small Business Administration - Fort Worth Office (disaster assistance)	.817/885-7600
National Marine Fisheries Service - St. Petersburg, FL (financial assistance division)	.813/570-5377
Texas Dept. of Insurance Claims - Austin	.800/252-3439
	(complaint dept.)
West Side Calhoun County Navigation District (Port of Port Lavaca)	.512/987-2813

Sea Grant
Marine Advisory Service

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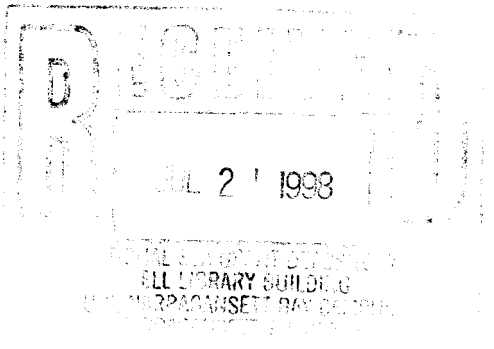

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