

# HURRICANE AND TROPICAL STORM DEPARTMENTAL ACTION PLAN

*Department of Communication  
College of Charleston*

*Approved: December 2007; Revised: June 2009*



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 [www.cofc.edu/emergency](http://www.cofc.edu/emergency). All Department of Communication employees should give careful attention to the *College of Charleston Hurricane and Tropical Storm Preparedness Plan*, available at the previously listed URL.

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 the 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 [www.cofc.edu/emergency](http://www.cofc.edu/emergency).

## 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 in the *College of Charleston Hurricane and Tropical Storm Preparedness Plan*. Faculty and staff members should not remain on campus if campus is closed. 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 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 home telephone and cellular telephone 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 e-mail addresses that might be used during or after a weather event. Faculty and staff members are reminded that a severe weather event might make cellular telephones with 843 area codes unusable in the days following the storm. Text messaging via cellular telephone may be restored before cellular voice service is available. Institutional e-mail and Web sites also might be compromised following a severe weather event.

1.4 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.

1.5 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. Private property is left in departmental offices at the risk of the individual faculty or staff member.

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

1.7 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.

1.8 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.

1.9 Prior to leaving campus, faculty and staff should attempt to back up their data to the College of Charleston data network and/or to other suitable media. Following any weather event, faculty and staff should not assume they will have remote access to any campus network, including access to stored data.

1.10 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, camcorders, digital cameras, and camcorder 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).

1.11 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.

1.12 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.

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

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.

1.15 University and rental vehicles for which the department is responsible should be moved, if at all possible, to parking garages, preferably at least two levels above the ground floor. No valuable equipment should be left in departmentally controlled vehicles when a hurricane or tropical storm is approaching.

## **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 re-opened 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 Hurricane and Tropical Storm Preparedness Plan*. 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 cellular telephone and a personal cellular telephone. The numbers for both phones ordinarily will be provided to all departmental faculty and staff.

4.2 To the fullest extent possible, faculty and staff are encouraged to check e-mail accounts and cellular telephone voicemail on a regular basis during and after any weather event. Following a severe hurricane, text messaging may be more reliable than other cellular telephone features.

4.3 The department chair will post updates whenever possible on the chair's Twitter account, which currently is available to anyone with Internet access at <http://twitter.com/BrianMcGeeCofC>. Cellular telephones can be set to receive Twitter updates as text messages.

4.4 The most severe hurricane events may seriously disrupt Internet and cellular telephone service in Charleston and South Carolina. If the department chair's cellular phones and College of Charleston e-mail account are not working reliably, the chair will secure cellular telephone service with a non-843 area code and activate a non-College of Charleston e-mail address. The chair will use the methods listed below to provide this updated contact information to the department's faculty and staff.

4.5 If evacuation schedules permit, the department and/or the School of Humanities and Social Sciences will activate and announce the URL for an emergency Web site prior to the hurricane or tropical storm event. An emergency Web site created for departmental use should be jointly maintained by the department chair and at least one other faculty or staff member. Current contact information for the chair will be posted to that site in the event that the designated cellular telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the College of Charleston and the Department of Communication do not operate or are not operating in a reliable fashion. The department chair also will post updates to the chair's Twitter account.

4.6 If no other method is available to supply contact information for the Department of Communication, the department chair will leave his or her contact information with the

office staff in the Department of Communication Studies<sup>1</sup> at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. The telephone number for the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University is 806.742.3911. The URL for this department at Texas Tech University is [www.ttu.edu/coms](http://www.ttu.edu/coms). Dr. Patrick Hughes, chair of the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University, has generously agreed that his department will provide emergency contact service in the event of a catastrophic weather event affecting the College of Charleston's Department of Communication. No detailed messages should be left with the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University. Please check all other message sources (e.g., Twitter) before contacting Texas Tech.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Communication Studies is separate from the College of Mass Communications at Texas Tech University. Please do not contact the College of Mass Communications.