

---

Posted on Sun, May. 28, 2006

## Along Jersey Shore, storm worries are great

**Meteorologists say timing is right for hurricanes. State officials are working to boost preparedness.**

By Jacqueline L. Urgo  
Inquirer Staff Writer

Call it the storm before the storm.

Up and down the coastline, as the 2006 hurricane season approaches, emergency workers, local officials and Shore residents say they are making unprecedented preparations for catastrophic storms, driven by the devastation that Hurricane Katrina inflicted on the Gulf Coast last year.

"The Jersey Shore is definitely overdue for a direct hit," National Weather Service meteorologist Jim Eberwine said. "And if a direct hit comes, it's clear that damage would be substantial and catastrophic."

Eberwine finds that when he speaks to groups, people are "actually talking about it and making plans" for a disaster for the first time on a wide scale.

And while New Jersey has not taken a direct hit from a hurricane in 103 years, Eberwine is not alone in his when-not-if stance.

### A more active season

AccuWeather Inc., a State College, Pa.-based for-profit weather agency, has predicted that the 2006 hurricane season, which begins Thursday, will be more active than usual and that the country's Northeast region will be hit by a major hurricane within the next five to 10 years.

"The prospect that we're going to see a major storm, even greater than the hurricanes of 1944, or '53, or even '38, is very high," said Joe Bastardi, an AccuWeather meteorologist who studies weather patterns with the same intensity with which bookies study racing forms.

"And when it occurred in the past, remember that it devastated a much smaller population and much smaller infrastructure."

Experts cite the "big one of 1916" that washed out to sea a mile and a half of Longport's south end, forever widening the Great Egg Harbor Inlet.

Hurricanes in 1938 and 1944 swept away miles of streets, homes and marinas, reconfiguring barrier islands from Sea Bright to Cape May.

And even though it wasn't a hurricane, a ferocious 1962 spring nor'easter is often used as a yardstick to measure the misery that could occur again at the Jersey Shore.

"My fear is that it'll happen sooner, rather than later," Bastardi said.

### Get insurance in order

Such forecasts should compel Shore dwellers to get their insurance in order before disaster strikes. They should obtain enough coverage to replace their home in today's dollars - not when they bought their home or made improvements - and they should have separate flood insurance, experts said.

State and local officials say they, too, are preparing. With an increase in population along the coastal areas - some 153 million people live within the 677 coastal counties in the United States - officials see preparation as a first line of defense.

In New Jersey, on any given summer weekend, as many as 1.1 million people are within the borders of Cape May County alone. The population of Long Beach Island swells to an estimated 450,000 in the summer. Beach towns in Atlantic, Ocean and Monmouth Counties attract more than 2 million in summer, officials said.

The first priority is to keep people safe, and "evacuation is certainly a large part of the plan in dealing with something like a hurricane," said Neal Buccino, a spokesman for the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

The agency this month held a first-ever drill at Atlantic City International Airport to test hurricane-evacuation plans.

The State Police, the New Jersey Army National Guard, the Coast Guard, and a private-sector helicopter-pilot volunteer group tested their radio compatibility as they performed various exercises with choppers. The drills included the "sling load," raising 1,200 gallons of drinking water up to a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and hoisting hurricane victims to safety with a 245-foot hydraulic cable.

New Jersey is one of only two states - the other is Michigan - where state police have direct jurisdiction over emergency-management operations during a disaster, Buccino and other officials said.

Officials here contend that would allow quick action on crucial decisions about public safety - such as imposing a "reverse-lane" strategy on major coastal evacuation routes and making all lanes of a particular roadway head away from the disaster.

Dean Ragone, a principal in AllRisk, a Somerdale and Avalon, N.J.-based firm specializing in property restoration after a disaster, said his company has received an unusually high number of inquiries about hurricane preparations this year.

"I think after seeing what Katrina did to the infrastructure in the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, people who own businesses and properties anywhere near water are much more aware of what can happen," Ragone said.

Ragone's firm was so inundated with queries that it set up a special page on its Web site - [www.allriskinc.com/](http://www.allriskinc.com/) - to answer them. The company offers tips to businesses to assess their risks, identify resources, and develop a continuity strategy for after a disaster.

That is the motivation driving Long Beach Township Mayor Dianne Gove to make hurricane preparations for her town's 12-miles of beachfront.

"I was 11 when the '62 storm hit," Gove said. "And I'll never forget seeing the entire island flooded, houses just washing away.

"The ocean met the bay on our street in a big wall of water, and the father of one of my classmates drowned," Gove said. "The aftermath of it all was so horrible. Remembering that is what motivates me to make sure we're prepared."

Gove said one saving grace in any coming storm, as opposed to 44 years ago, is that meteorologists these days can make better predictions.

"We should have more time to heed the warnings and react in terms of evacuations," Gove said. "And in a place like Long Beach Island, where there is only one way on and one way off the island, that's extremely important."

---

Contact staff writer Jacqueline L. Urgo at 609-823-9629 or [jurgo@phillynews.com](mailto:jurgo@phillynews.com).