

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CAREER FOR A HURRICANE EVACUATION

Hurricanes don't just affect housing. They can also affect employment.

According to the U.S. Census, 1 in 2 Americans live in a coastal county that could be affected by hurricanes. One hidden cost of hurricanes--jobs. In October 2005, the Department of Labor estimated that over 230,000 jobs were lost in Hurricane Katrina alone. I have seen the affects that a storm can have first-hand: after Katrina, I worked with other volunteers to establish a temporary career center in Biloxi, Mississippi. During that time, I talked to relief workers and job seekers. Here are five of the "career" emergency preparedness strategies that I learned from Katrina:

1. **If you are currently employed, know your company's emergency contact plan.** Maintain a list of multiple phones and e-mail addresses of people that you can contact after the storm: if your employer is an independent or local business that runs off of local service providers for phone and internet, you can expect downtime after the storm.
2. **Store electronic copies of your documents.** Online storage providers or web-based services such as Google Documents or Microsoft Office Live Workspace will enable you to access your resume, recommendations, and other career-related information from anywhere-should you have need of it.
3. **Keep important identification and financial records together—and take it with you in a waterproof document holder.** You need more than a driver's license alone to establish identity at a new job, make sure you have the identification necessary to complete the I-9 Eligibility form required by all U.S. employers.
4. **Develop your own personal business continuity plan:** if your phone or e-mail service is provided by a local business, have a back-up plan.

The U.S. Portability number rule will allow you to transfer your landline number to a cell phone number-or to keep your cell phone number even if you move to a new area. This guide will show you how: <http://tinyurl.com/6cn8q3>. If you don't have one already, sign-up for a free e-mail account through providers such as Gmail, Yahoo! , or AOL and forward copies of your e-mail to your remote account.

5. **If you evacuate and have room, pack at least one professional outfit that fits you well-even if you don't need it for interviewing,** you will be glad you have it later if your personal belongings are affected by the storm.

Follow these steps and you'll be better prepared to preserve your career-even in the face of the strongest obstacles. If your housing and employment situation is disrupted by the storm, breathe. Be reassured: people will be attentive to your professional needs after the storm even if the worst happens. Following Katrina, many national career organizations and career practitioners joined together to offer free counseling services through Volunteers for Careers. While the service is

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currently inactive, it will be reactivated based on need—and you can contact other career professional associations, such as the National Association of Career Development and the Career Management Alliance, to request assistance in the interim.

In the short term, put your safety first: It is hard to work without food and shelter. Relief workers frequently cite the importance of following Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs." The American Red Cross and other relief organizations will be available to provide first response services to you. Additionally, take care of your mental health: according to SAMSHA, a federal agency providing mental health services, 25% to 30 % of the population (affected by a hurricane) may experience clinically significant mental health needs. Changes in jobs and physical location can be stressful even when anticipated—take care of yourself first, and remember that career-related assistance will be there when you need it later.

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