

News Release

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We're Halfway Through

Tampa, Florida (September, 2013). Hurricane season is at about its midpoint since the season ends November 30, 2013. Most Floridians and residents of other states typically keep a close eye on weather reports regarding tropical depressions, tropical storms and hurricanes. We become familiar with the terms “watch” and “warning.” Other media forms such as newspapers have published special editions regarding storm preparation. This year it was reported that the Tampa region was number one in regard to locations that could be hit by a major storm. On August 8, 2013 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published an updated prediction with a 70% chance that this would be an “above normal” season.

“Our confidence for an above-normal season is still high because the predicted atmospheric and oceanic conditions that are favorable for storm development have materialized,” said Gerry Bell, Ph.D., lead seasonal hurricane forecaster at [NOAA's Climate Prediction Center](#), a division of the [National Weather Service](#). “Also, two of the four named storms to-date formed in the deep tropical Atlantic, which historically is an indicator of an active season.”

The conditions in place now are similar to those that have produced many active Atlantic hurricane seasons since 1995, and include above-average Atlantic sea surface temperatures and a stronger rainy season in West Africa, which produces wind patterns that help turn storm systems there into tropical storms and hurricanes.

The updated outlook calls for a 70 percent chance of an above-normal season. Across the Atlantic Basin for the entire season – June 1 to November 30 – NOAA's updated seasonal outlook (which includes the activity to date of tropical storms Andrea, Barry, Chantal, and Dorian) projects a 70 percent chance for each of the following ranges:

- 13 to 19 named storms (top winds of 39 mph or higher), including

- 6 to 9 hurricanes (top winds of 74 mph or higher), of which
- 3 to 5 could be major hurricanes (Category 3, 4 or 5; winds of at least 111 mph)

These ranges are above the 30-year seasonal averages of 12 named storms, six hurricanes and three major hurricanes.”

While some individuals may continue in a state of denial that they will ever experience the impact of such predictions, many have experienced feeling anxious and concerned when another hurricane season arrives. In some areas of the country, individuals are still in the process of recovering from the last hurricane season, tornados, flooding and other weather conditions and now we are in the middle of another season. Government officials, including national, state and local, keep reminding citizens to stock up on supplies, make evacuation plans and arrange for pet care. It isn't too late to make plans to be aware in terms of social and emotional readiness.

According to Charles R. Figley, Ph.D. of the FSU Traumatology Institute, there are four phases individuals face whenever there is the possibility of a potential disaster and each phase has it's own set of demands:

- **Anticipation and Preparation**
- **Disaster Impact**
- **Immediate Post-Disaster Impact**
- **Long-term Post-Disaster Impact**

This article will deal with the first phase.

Individuals react differently to anticipating a potential disaster. Some make plans as advised long in advance of the possibility of a hurricane. They heed the warnings and stock up on supplies, plan an evacuation route and notify out-of-area family and friends of their pre-determined, and if necessary alternate, route. They buy products to secure their home, make sure they have all important documents and pictures/records of their possessions in a safe place, and even make arrangements for a place to stay in the event of evacuation. They keep an eye on the information being released and start their travel well before the roads become parking lots. This can help an individual and family to restore a sense of control over the uncontrollable.

Others enter into a state of denial thinking that the “bullet has been dodged” multiple times and will be again. No worry. No planning. Just a wait and see attitude.

Other individuals engage in a panic response. They are the ones that get to the store when the shelves are empty of water, when the home supply stores are out of plywood or batteries, and spend their time running from place to place to get what they can.

Social support is a major factor in anticipating any situation that is out of one's control. Talk with family, friends and neighbors to both offer and receive support. Maintain a rational approach - this will go a long way in minimizing anxiety and panic. Remember that each individual, even within the same family, will react differently. Even small children will pick up either a calm or frenzied response based on how others around them might be acting. As Dr. Figley says, "Be aware kids know when you are scared." Different age groups respond differently to the same event. It is important to realize that small children may not be able to verbalize their fears and concerns. Listen and reassure them. Involve everyone in the planning - even a small child can let you know what toy they want to have with them. Don't leave children alone. Encourage children to talk.

Remember that anxiety and worry saps us of our energy, may keep us awake at night and change how we are able to deal with everyday changes – you don't have to keep worrying since help is a phone call away. When you call the EAP, you can explore in a confidential setting the concerns that you have and receive assistance to determine how to remain safe. When you need to sort out your feelings about what is happening in your life help is a phone call away. If you have found yourself or a loved one caught up in having more negative rather than positive views of life and are not sure where to turn or what you should do, help is just a phone call away. Call your EAP. You can explore in a confidential setting the concerns that you have and receive assistance to determine how to remain safe. Remember that when you need to sort out your feelings about what is happening in your life help is a phone call away. The EAP can help you find a new path so that the changes you need to make can be managed. Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to you and your dependents Help is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

EAP is a tool for personal and professional growth. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. The EAP representative will help you find the best solution for your particular situation and help is just a phone call away. Call: (813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County, Florida), (727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County, Florida), or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing EAP services.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in

the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.