

SAFFIR/SIMPSON SCALE

Hurricanes, no matter how weak, are dangerous. The combination of storm surge, wind and other contributing factors determines a hurricane's destructive power. In order to compare the disaster potential of hurricanes, emergency forces utilize a scale that helps them predict potential hazards. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's forecasters use the Saffir/Simpson Scale to assign hurricanes to five categories: Category 1 being a minimum hurricane and Category 5 being the most severe or intense. The criteria for each category are described below:



Graphic courtesy of Lafayette Utilities System

CATEGORY 1 74 - 95 MPH

Damage to buildings is slight. Manufactured homes that are unanchored as well as with shrubbery and trees sustain some damage. Some minor pier damage and coastal road flooding will occur.

Category 2 96 - 110 mph

Some damage to buildings occurs, such as roofing materials, doors and windows. A considerable amount of damage happens to vegetation, unanchored manufactured homes and piers. Two to four hours before the arrival of the center, coastal and low-lying escape routes flood. Small craft in unprotected anchorages break moorings.

Category 3 111 - 130 mph

Unanchored manufactured homes may be destroyed. Structural and some curtain wall damage occurs to small residences and utility buildings. Flooding destroys smaller structures near the coast. Larger structures are damaged by floating debris. Terrain that is continuously lower than five feet above sea level (ASL) may be flooded eight miles inland.

Category 4 131 - 155 mph

Extensive curtain wall failures with some complete roof structure failures on small residences may occur. Major erosion to beaches and damage to lower floors of structures near the shore occurs. Terrain continuously lower than 10 feet ASL may be flooded, requiring massive evacuation of residential areas as far as six miles inland.

Category 5 155+ mph

Complete roof failure on many residences and industrial buildings. Some complete building failures with small utility buildings blown over or away. Major damage to lower floors of all structures located less than 15 feet ASL and within 500 yards of the shoreline. Massive evacuation of residential areas on low ground within five to 10 miles of the shoreline may be required.