



Together, we can save a life

Survey Results

Coastal County Poll Continues to Show Many Households Ill-Prepared for Hurricanes and Flooding – February 2004

Executive Summary

The latest February 2004 poll¹ of American coastal county residents revealed few notable improvements in levels of disaster preparedness among coastal families at risk since the previous poll conducted in May 2001. Not surprisingly, residents with prior involvement in a hurricane/flood and those who live in flood zones were more likely to show concern about a hurricane and to have a preparedness plan, including a disaster supplies kit. The number of coastal respondents who reported having an *evacuation* plan, however, increased modestly since the previous poll.

Methodology/Findings

Since September 2000, the American Red Cross has commissioned a public opinion poll to better understand the level of hurricane preparedness among the nearly 48 million residents living within the 177 counties along the U.S. seacoast from Maine to Texas. The February 2004 poll was conducted among 500 residents among these coastal counties. Included on this latest poll was an oversample of residents of southern states from Virginia through Texas to show comparisons in preparedness between the overall sample and residents of more hurricane prone areas (see Appendix).

Additionally, a new question was included to identify the organizations that coastal residents turn to for disaster preparedness.

Detailed findings are below:

Concern

- Half of coastal residents report that during hurricane season² they are *Not very concerned or Not concerned at all* about the possibility that they and their family will be in harm's way because of a hurricane or flood. The balance of concerned residents and not concerned residents is nearly equal (50 percent not concerned versus 49 percent concerned). Coastal residents who live in flood zones and those who reported that they or their families had been involved in a hurricane/flood in the past, however, were more likely to be concerned (64 percent and 54 percent, respectively).
- Sixty-one percent of respondents report that they are about as concerned as they were last year about the possibility of being affected by a disaster. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) report being more concerned than they were a year ago.
- 58 percent of respondents report that they or their family had been involved in a hurricane or flood in the past. This is similar to the May 2001 finding (55 percent).

¹ Poll of 500 randomly selected residents living in coastal counties from Maine to Texas. The latest poll was conducted in February 2004. Margin of error for the poll is +/-4%. Included in the February poll was an oversample of 145 residents of southern states from Virginia through Texas. The February 2004 and March 2001 polls were conducted by Issues and Answers. The initial September 2000 poll was conducted by Harris Interactive.

² Wording slightly modified in 2004.

Survey Results

Preparedness

- Preparedness was comparable in most respects to the previous poll. Nearly three-fifths of coastal residents overall (59 percent) do not have an evacuation plan to prepare for the possibility of a hurricane, a similar finding to May 2001 in which 57 percent of respondents did not have a plan. Residents on the recent poll with no plan were more likely to have no prior involvement in a hurricane/flood (70 percent) and to live outside of flood zones (62 percent). Younger respondents (18-34 years old) were also more likely to have no evacuation plan (66 percent)
- Among coastal residents with an evacuation plan, 84 percent of those with children in the household say that their children know the evacuation plan. This is essential in the event that an evacuation is ordered during a time of day when families are separated (e.g., children are in school and parents are at work). Furthermore, 43 percent of residents overall report that their pets are included in these plans. This is important since pets are not permitted in evacuation shelters for health reasons.
- Though the majority of coastal residents do not have an evacuation plan, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) report having a relocation plan if they were forced to leave their homes for several days due to a hurricane. This represents a slight increase from the May 2001 poll in which 59 percent of residents had an evacuation plan.

Disaster Supplies Kits:

- Forty-percent of respondents report that they have assembled a disaster supplies kit that contains items that their family would need in the event that they would need to leave home due to a hurricane. This represents an insignificant change from May 2001 in which 37 percent of residents had disaster kits. Residents with prior involvement in a hurricane/flood were more likely to have a kit (46 percent).
- Disaster kits were most likely to contain flashlights and least likely to contain written instructions for turning off electricity, gas and water. (See chart below.) Lower-income respondents, as well as, those with no-education beyond high school were more likely (44 percent and 50 percent, respectively) than other residents to include written instructions in their kits.

Item	Percent
Flashlight	99%
Water	90%
Battery Powered Radio	81%
Medications	83%
Food	89%
Clothes	77%
Instructions on how to turn off utilities	39%

Survey Results

Special Needs:

- Ten percent of respondents have a person in the household with a disability or health problem that requires special attention such as a special diet or the use of medical equipment. Seventy-one percent of these families report having a plan to ensure that the special needs of this family member could be met during an evacuation. This represents a sharp increase from the May 2001 poll in which only half of residents who had special needs family members had a plan. In the event of a major evacuation, difficulties in meeting these needs can give rise to life-threatening situations.
- Forty-two percent of residents have a person in their household that has a health problem that requires daily medication. About 91 percent report having a disaster kit that includes a supply of medication that could be used in the event of an evacuation. Replacing essential medications during an evacuation can present significant challenges, particularly if the nature of the disaster makes it difficult to contact the prescribing physician or the dispensing pharmacy.

Information:

- When asked what organization they would turn to for information or training about how to prepare for a natural or man-made disaster or other emergency situation, 45 percent of coastal residents named the American Red Cross. Residents with children in the household as well as those with higher incomes (\$50K or more) are more likely to voluntarily name the American Red Cross as a source of disaster/emergency preparedness information. No other organization was mentioned by more than 7 percent of respondents.

American Red Cross	45%
Police	7%
Fire Department	6%
Local/city government	3%
FEMA	3%
Internet	3%

- When compared to national findings from the January 2004 public opinion poll, in which a similar question was asked of 1,000 Americans, 57 percent named the American Red Cross as an organization that they would turn to for disaster-related preparedness information.

Survey Results

Appendix: Southern States Versus Overall Sample

Additional interviews³ were conducted among residents of the southern part of the coastline from Virginia through Texas to ascertain any differences between the overall sample of coastal residents and residents in the typically hurricane prone southern areas. When compared to the overall sample, these southern residents tended to be more *concerned* during hurricane season about the possibility that they or their family would be in harm's way because of a hurricane or flood. There were no significant differences, however, in southern residents' likelihood to have an evacuation plan or a disaster supplies kit.

	Southern States (n=400)	Overall (n=500)
How concerned? (V or SW)	58%	49%
More or less concerned? (More than last year)	24%	24%
More or less concerned? (Less than last year)	11%	12%
More or less concerned? (About the same)	60%	61%
Have an evacuation plan	47%	41%
Have a place to stay if forced from home	69%	65%
Have a disaster supplies kit	44%	40%
Children know of evacuation plan	83%	84%
Pets included in evacuation plan	42%	43%
Been in a hurricane/flood	66%	58%
Live in a flood zone	27%	22%
Turn to Red Cross for Disaster Info	43%	45%

³ The overall *random* sample of 500 consisted of approximately 255 respondents in the southern coastal states of Virginia through Texas. An additional oversample of 145 respondents in these southern coastal states was added, giving a total of 400 southern respondents and yielding a +/- 5% margin of error at the 95% confidence level.