The recent wind event, tornado or not, is a scary reminder of the severe weather from the tornadoes of 1998 and a reminder that hurricane season is around the corner. We all hope the summer rains will begin soon, but the heavy winds and hail which accompany our typical afternoon thunder storms may harm you and your property. Take precautions when severe conditions are announced and seek safe shelter. These fast moving storm fronts can have wind gusts over 50 miles an hour.

Tornadoes move in quickly and often accompany storm fronts. Hurricanes on the other hand, usually form off shore and allow us time to prepare. Even though we are inland, a storm the size of Hurricane Floyd can cause a lot of damage to our Central Florida area. A programmable weather radio will alert you when severe weather is predicted so you can take appropriate action.

June 1 marks the beginning of Hurricane season. Are you ready? While we don’t know when or where they will hit, now is the time to get prepared. Most residents have never been through a hurricane. They are dangerous but you can take precautions if you know what to expect before, during and after a storm. Osceola County Emergency Management and our office have teamed up to prepare an information packet to help you get ready. Call (321) 697-3000 for some great fact sheets or check out our web site http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu for a link to the University of Florida's Disaster Handbook.

You may know to have food and water on hand, but few know the importance of landscape care before hurricanes arrive. Wind and rain are hazards of hurricanes so think of ways to reduce their damage. Large trees with big canopies catch the wind like an umbrella. Arrange now to have a competent arborist thin large trees, such as oaks, to reduce wind resistance. Ask for references so you can go see their work. Good arborists know they should show proof of workers’ compensation insurance for the date of the job. Also, ask to see their occupational license which authorizes them to do business in the city and/or the county.

The International Society of Arboriculture certifies arborists in approved methods of tree trimming, problem diagnosis and care. It is a voluntary program and demonstrates "professionalism" so ask if your tree service person has been certified. If not, encourage them to participate. Training and tests are offered in Central Florida each year. The Tree Academy at Trees Florida 2001 conference is next month and tree trimming techniques are always on the agenda. Landscapers, landscape architects, arborists, growers, inspectors and contractors are welcome to attend. Contact our office for a copy of the registration form.

A properly thinned tree will not look pruned. Surprising to many, no major limbs are lopped off. The trees shouldn’t look like poodles with leaves clustered at the tips of the branches either. Instead, side branches are selectively removed along the full length of the limbs to thin the entire tree canopy. Have dead or weak branches removed to prevent them from snapping in high winds. Flying debris such as fallen limbs act like missiles in high winds and can cause much damage to windows, screen rooms and landscape plantings.

If a hurricane approaches, gather all yard furniture and other loose objects and move them into an enclosure such as a garage. If you cannot move garbage cans inside, fill them with water to keep them from blowing away in the wind. Move potted plants close to the house and cluster them together to reduce wind damage. Hurricanes are normally accompanied by heavy rains. Be sure gutters and down spouts are cleaned of leaves and sticks to allow water to drain quickly from the roof.

For more information on tree pruning or other information on preparing for hurricanes, contact the Osceola County Extension Office at (321) 697-3000. We have fact sheets available in English and Spanish. Prepare now to avoid excessive damage when a storm arrives. We will have a hurricane; it's just
If you work in the hospitality industry, find out if your property is ready for hurricane season. The better prepared the management is, the sooner you can be back in business after a storm and keep the paychecks coming in. Managers, engineering, food service and security staff of hotels, motels, apartments and condominiums are invited to attend a full day Hurricane/Disaster Preparedness Workshop sponsored by the University of Florida. Participants are encouraged to come as a team.

The program will cover things learned from the experience of Hurricane Andrew and Floyd. Businesses will learn from emergency management staff and insurance businesses. Participants will find out how to prepare their property and better serve their concerns as well as those of their families, guests and residents. The program will be held Friday, June 15 at the Hyatt Orlando on Highway 192. Call (321) 697-3000 for a schedule and registration form. The registration fee includes lunch, a detailed Hurricane/Disaster handbook, staff training and guest video.

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