

# Playing Florida's Russian Roulette

Living in Florida, we are only about 3 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. This is a beautiful thing most of the time, but paradise comes with a price. We live in the bulls eye zone of hurricanes, and each hurricane season we wonder if this will be one of the years that we get hit.

The reality of this danger was brought clearly to our attention just a couple of weeks ago. We anxiously watched as hurricane Idalia charged across the Gulf of Mexico, heading straight for us. With winds reaching 130 miles per hour, Idalia became a category 4 hurricane. Only a category 5 is stronger.

Luckily for us, the hurricane turned East and once again we dodged a bullet. However, our fortune became Keaton Beach's misfortune. According to Terry Spencer, "Hurricane Idalia tore into Florida at the speed of a fast-moving train Wednesday, splitting trees in half, ripping roofs off hotels and turning small cars into boats..."

There were casualties, however the death toll was low because Idalia happened to hit one of the least populated areas of Florida. Unfortunately, this usually isn't the case. Most of the time the population is denser and the casualties higher.

Lessons learned from hurricane Ian, is another reason why hurricane Idalia's death toll was so low. With the memory of Hurricane Ian fresh on their minds, Floridians heeded the evacuation warnings and left the area before it was too late. This proactive behavior undoubtedly saved lives.

Ian struck the coast of Florida last year with the force of a category 5. With winds reaching 160 miles per hour, this was Florida's most costly hurricane. Ian killed over 150 people and the cost of damages was well over 112 billion dollars.

There are many things a person can do to prepare for the ravages of hurricanes. Of course, the best thing to do is to evacuate when the evacuation orders are given. Those who die are usually the ones who choose to stay, knowingly putting themselves in danger. Some people never learn.

Most of the destruction is created by the eye of the hurricane, which is usually around 20-40 miles across. This eye can travel up to 200 miles inland as it destroys and kills along the way, tearing up trees, toppling buildings and flooding everything in its path. For those who are not in the direct path of the eye, and don't suffer the full brunt of the storm, are not necessarily out of danger. The destructive path of a hurricane extends far past the eye, and can reach hundreds of miles in each direction.

Those who are not in the evacuation zone or choose to stay home, must now deal with the destructive force of this savage storm. This may include falling trees, broken power lines, loss of electricity and flooding. These are just a few of the problems that can be caused by high winds and heavy rainfall. If you are lucky, your house will escape damage, however roof damage is very common and often requires replacement.

Those who can afford it, have gas-powered backup generators. So when the lights go out, they can keep their refrigerator going and the food in their freezer from thawing out. Sometimes the electricity can be out for days, and losing everything in your refrigerator and freezer can be fairly costly.

You always know when a hurricane is headed your way. The grocery store shelves suddenly go empty and finding water becomes quite a challenge. Having a first aid kit is always a plus, as well as knowing what your evacuation routes are. Being prepared is a must when you live in the hurricane zone. Large windows usually get boarded up and sand bags become invaluable when water rises to your doorstep.

Living in the hurricane zone is truly like Russian Roulette. You are in a hit and miss situation, and you never know when you are going to be hit. One thing is for sure though, one day you will be. Just as with real Russian Roulette, there is a bullet in the chamber. If you play long enough, you will eventually get hit. The only way to avoid this, is to not play. If you don't want to take the risk, then your only option is to move to a safer location. On the other hand, if you are an adrenaline junkie, you can move to California and play Russian Roulette with earthquakes.