Surviving Cyclones in the Pacific Region - Are You Prepared?

Tropical cyclones are relatively common in the Pacific; over the past 55 years, they have caused significant damage and killed scores of people. The effects of tropical cyclones include flooding, destructive winds, storm surges and loss of life. Communities in at-risk areas should be aware of the risk and be prepared for the possibility of a tropical cyclone impact. The Pacific Cyclone Season commences on/or around the 1st November and runs until 30th April the following year, although severe weather patterns often occur outside the official season. Sustained wind speeds summarized as follows:

- Gale force winds: 62 – 88 km/hr.;
- Storm force winds: 89 – 117 km/hr.;
- Cyclone force winds: over 117 km/hr.; and
- Remember that the maximum gusts may be much stronger than the sustained speeds.

1. Cyclonic Storm Characteristic:
   a) Tropical Cyclonic storms have different names in different parts of the world. In East and Southeast Asia, they are called typhoons; in the Americas, hurricanes; and in the Pacific, cyclones.
   b) Tropical Cyclones (TC) develop over warm (tropical) seas of more than 27°C, when the prevailing winds interact around an existing low air pressure system to set up a spiral wind circulation. South of the Equator cyclonic winds rotate in a clockwise direction and cyclones are generated in the South Pacific by the interaction of the Northwest Monsoon and the Southeast Trade Winds.
   c) Cyclones vary in intensity and size, stretching up to 600 km across, whilst the calm center or eye can be anything from 15 to 150 km in diameter. The strongest winds and rain are closest to the eye and in the cyclone’s Southeast quadrant – its ‘leading edge’.
   d) When reports of the position of a cyclone are generated, the location refers to the eye of the cyclone. As gales and heavy rain can extend up to 300 km ahead of the eye, people can be caught unprepared on land and at sea. Cyclones travel across the surface of the sea at speeds of 8 to 40 km/hr.
   e) The detection and forecasting of cyclones, and their movement is often very erratic. The error in predicting a cyclone’s position is therefore much greater for a long-range forecast rather than a short range forecast and can be as much as a 150 km error over a 24-hour period.
   f) Although the most striking feature of cyclones are their strong winds, most of the damage is usually caused by the storm surge and not wind. Be prepared for high storm surge along coastlines (up to 10 m at high tide) and torrential and prolonged rainfall, which can produce flooding and landslides.

2. Cyclone Preparations:

   - Prepare family emergency procedures for when a cyclone threatens.
   - Prepare your Family Plan and Survival Kit/s.

Preparing prior to the tropical cyclone season can minimise damage to your property and save you time in an emergency. These following actions will help prepare your property from severe storms and even floods.
• Trimming overhanging trees and branches around your property
• Fitting shutters or metal screens to glass areas
• Clearing away loose items in your yard or on your balcony
• Securing sky/satellite and TV aerials/dishes.
• Obtain a stock of domestic fuel (kerosene/gas) for lanterns and cooking.
• Stock up on non-perishable foods, which require little or no cooking.
• Stock-up on torch and radio batteries.
• If leaving on holiday, ensure that your home is secured and that a neighbour or friend is briefed to look after it, and fit shutters if necessary.
• Clearing leaves and other debris from gutters and downpipes
• Staff may wish to follow the websites shown that provide accurate and up to date information on tracking and notifications of Tsunami, Cyclones and Earthquakes in the pacific - (GDACS, USGS, PTWC, Fiji Met Service). GDACS: Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (www.gdacs.org). USGS: U.S. Geological Survey (www.usgs.gov). PTWC: Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (www.weather.gov/ptwc) and Fiji Meteorological Service (www.met.gov.fj).

Prior to the cyclone season you should identify the strongest part of your property to move to should a cyclone occur in your area. You should also find out if your property is prone to flash or riverine flooding or storm surge. Shown below are UNDSS and national advisories you may receive:

Types of advisory messages - The Tropical Cyclone Warning Centre and UNDSS will issue several messages and a number broadcast on all local radio and television stations and via the warden/SMS bulk system/s. A Tropical Cyclone Watch is issued by the local Bureau of Meteorology for coastal communities when gales are expected within 48 hours.

3. DSS recommended actions to take after receiving a cyclone alert:

• Take note of the current location of the cyclone, its direction and speed of travel, and the forecast wind speeds.
• Ensure that all your family members are present or accounted for. Check on your neighbour.
• Check the contents of your Family Survival Kit and/or Individual Emergency Kit.
• Refuel your vehicle. Secure outdoor objects, which may be blown away or uprooted. Lighten/trim heavily laden fruit trees. Stay tuned to your local radio station for further advisory messages.

4. Actions to take after receiving a cyclone warning:

• Take note of the location of the cyclone, its direction and speed of travel, and the forecast wind speeds. Check to see if schools have been closed by the authorities. Ensure all family members are accounted for and know the safe havens and family cyclone action plan i.e. emergency contact numbers, locations of medical kits, family survival kits, and important documentation.
• Ensure the safety of your pets. Check on neighbours.
• Plan your time before the cyclone arrives, to avoid last-minute panic.
• Seal valuables (documents, passports, photos, insurance papers, money, etc.) and clothing in strong waterproof plastic bags.
• Fill suitable containers with fresh water.
• Ensure you have enough food/rations, sanitary items and emergency lighting/ cooking requirements for the family for a 3-day period, secured in your premises.
• Batten down the house and secure all doors and windows.
• If your house is not structurally sound or is otherwise threatened (by storm surge or floods), prepare to move to the nearest Designated National Evacuation Centre in your area.
5. **Actions to take during the cyclone event:**

- Keep listening to the radio for updates and advice.
- Disconnect appliances. Stay inside well clear of windows, sheltering in the strongest part of the house (internal hallway, bathroom or cellar). Keep your emergency kit with you.
- If the building begins to break up, protect yourself with a rug, mattress or blanket and shelter under a bench or table.
- **DO NOT** assume that the *eye of the cyclone* means the danger has passed - wait for the 'all clear'.
- Stay in your vehicle if caught on the road, with the car handbrake on and parked well clear of trees, power lines and possible flooding. Never drive, ride or walk in floodwaters.
- Keep your Family Survival Kit safe, dry, and at hand. Remain calm and keep your children entertained. Unplug all electrical appliances to protect against lightning strike. Again - **STAY INDOORS**, well clear of all doors and windows. Use your telephone only for emergency calls only. If the power is cut, avoid opening your fridge or freezer too often. If tap water looks off colour, boil it before use.
- Listen to your local radio station/s for further warnings and situation updates. Beware of a sudden calm period – this may just be the eye of the storm, and the wind may return within minutes, but from the opposite direction. Avoid unnecessary exposure to the elements and stay clear of coastal areas and rivers due to storm surges.
- Evacuating during the event is extremely hazardous and not recommended, call UNDSS and/or emergency services for assistance. If you’re left with no option but to evacuate in an extreme situation, beware of further hazards such as flood waters, debris etc and take your Family Emergency Kit (see annex A) with you.

6. **Actions to take after the cyclone passes:**

- Wait for the 'All Clear' before leaving shelter.
- Check for gas leaks.
- **DO NOT** use wet appliances.
- Stay away from damaged trees, structures and fallen power lines.
- Never drive, ride or walk through floodwaters.
- Check on and help your neighbours.
- Don’t go sightseeing as you may hinder the work of the emergency services and place yourself and others in danger.
- Conserve your water supplies until safe supplies are restored.
- Guard against spoiled food in fridges and freezers if the power is cut.

In a life-threatening emergency, call UNDSS or your nearest police station in your vicinity immediately. Do not forget to report your status, safety and wellbeing to your warden on request from UNDSS and/or your Area Security Coordinator (ASC) / Country Security Focal Point (CSFP) or warden.

7. **Recommended Emergency Survival kit/s:**

The following list forms the basic equipment that you will need in order to move through a relocation/evacuation with some degree of comfort. Similarly, for planned travel within the country these items are recommended to be carried (even on one day trips) to ease the situation should you be stranded. Other items may be included but the total weight of the bag/case **must not exceed 15 kg**. This bag should be located within the confines of your work place (office) during working hours and at the residence during the evening. Ensure that the bag carries a label with your name, index number and agency.

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8. **Recommended PACKING LIST:**

1. Documents (UN ID card, National passport, UN Laissez Passer, Driver licenses, Immunization card.
2. Cash.
3. Communications equipment: Cell phone and charger, satellite telephone.
4. Emergency contact information (Comms tree & staff list & phone numbers).
5. 1.5 litres of water (minimum) per person.
6. Food /Snack items (for one-day minimum).
7. Torch / headlamp (incl. Batteries) and Candles with matches (water proof).
8. Map of the area of travel.
9. Toiletries & Towel.
10. Medication.
11. First Aid kit.
12. Insect repellent.
13. Clothing (spare set to change including sturdy shoes).
14. Sleeping bag or sleeping sock (lightweight).
15. Mosquito net and strings (where applicable).
16. Sun protection (Sunscreen, Sunhat, Sunglasses).
17. Pocket knife, cutlery (fork, spoon set).
18. Pen & paper.
19. Water purification tablets.
20. Toilet paper and hand wipes.
21. Nylon cord / para cord (min 5 m length).

-END-

Annex A:

Recommended run bag and family crisis pack; and
UN Emergency Contact Details (Fiji and Samoa MCO’s).
Where can I get information?
The main sources of cyclone information are radio and television stations. During a cyclone threat, some stations keep local staff on duty 24 hours a day to broadcast cyclone information. Because of the high chance of the power supply being disrupted, it is important to have a battery-operated radio to listen for cyclone advices.

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UNDSS also provides the latest watches, warnings and supporting information through its advisories and Warden services and emergency contact numbers as shown below.

In cases of emergency and/or to report your safety, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following UN personnel below.

### Emergency Contact List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>CSFP Cook Islands – ADB Lavinia TAMA</td>
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<td>CSFP Nauru – UNDP Phaedora Harris</td>
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<td>+674 556 7917/557 2960</td>
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UNDSS Emergency Contact details 24/7: +679 999 1682 and +679 9991735.