

Surfrider Foundation Guidance: Responding to Extreme Weather Events

Extreme weather events such as hurricanes, coastal flooding, severe rain and wind, etc., and the impacts associated with these events (i.e. rapid coastal erosion, landslides, damaged infrastructure, wastewater overflows, loss of public access/recreation, etc.) require prompt disaster relief responses. The Surfrider Foundation has created this document as a resource for chapters that are interested in supporting these response efforts.

The Surfrider Foundation's local and knowledgeable human network can play a critical role to support municipalities and local and federal agencies in disaster relief efforts. It's critical that any volunteer efforts are coordinated with other organizations, agencies and decision makers to ensure the assistance provided aids organized efforts and protects the safety of our volunteers. Please see appendix below for resources that may be helpful to these end.

When responding to natural disasters and extreme weather events, Surfrider employs a three step approach. The first step is to help with cleanup efforts. The second step advocate for low impact responses to coastal erosion, and the third step is to advocate for long-term climate change adaptation planning.

On The Ground Efforts:

All cleanup/disaster response efforts should be organized at the chapter level in coordination with the appropriate organizations. Chapter leaders and HQ Staff will monitor response efforts orchestrated at the local level to help determine which government agencies are involved in the response, and what local agency is responsible for the cleanup efforts. The local chapter will designate a Cleanup Coordinator who helps maintain contact information for all the agencies and organizations working on the response, and oversees response efforts to ensure maximum coordination among agencies and Surfrider volunteers.

If local agencies utilize volunteers to assist with cleanup and remediation efforts, they may require some type of training. If training is involved, work directly with the agency responsible for training volunteers. If no official training is required, it's imperative that all volunteers receive a safety briefing from the local chapter, focusing on avoiding harmful objects and hazardous materials—and sign a waiver of liability which can be accessed through Chapternet or HQ Staff. While volunteers may be highly motivated to assist with response efforts, safety considerations must be prioritized. Finally, as with any cleanup, chapter leaders should determine ahead of time where debris should be properly disposed.

In addition to working with local and federal agencies on response effort, it is essential all response efforts be communicated to chapter and community members.

Of course, designating a chapter spokesperson to serve as the main contact point will be helpful when responding to community and media inquiries.

Documenting cleanup efforts is equally important. A designated photographer can help capture volunteer efforts and “tell the story” behind the cleanup. Writing a quick blog about response efforts is another good vehicle for documentation.

Advocating for Low Impact Response:

In the short term, the sentiment is often to rebuild just the way things were or immediately armor the coast through emergency permits. While this may be politically appealing, it can often lead to over engineering of the coast that will create long-term impacts. Given time, the shoreline and dunes often redevelop naturally, so taking time to respond to short-term erosion or flooding can provide a window for more long-term strategies.

Advocating for Climate Change Adaptation:

What does climate change adaptation look like to Surfrider? Our adaptation efforts are similar to what we have been advocating for decades. First, we want development set back from the shoreline so coastal processes can maintain a natural sand flow along and to the beach and dune systems that allows for natural barriers that help combat the impacts of storms and extreme weather events.

Second, we want to see improved wastewater infrastructure (storm drains, sewage, septic systems, etc.). During rain events, sewage overflow and wastewater systems often flood and cause water quality problems. Climate change will increase the intensity and frequency of storms, and Surfrider advocates that faulty systems are upgraded and wastewater is recycled so it can be taken out of the system and not discharged into the ocean.

Recovery efforts following extreme weather events provide an opportunity to improve poorly planned or dated development issues and inadequate infrastructure. Surfrider has an opportunity to influence local, state, and national planning efforts to be more ‘proactive’ and incorporate adaptation measures.

Surfrider must continue to push local, state and federal governments to reduce risk to public assets and adjacent natural habitats by limiting shoreline development and locating public infrastructure out of the pathway of the sea and the dynamic shoreline. Over time, managed retreat will create a barrier between eroding beaches and rising sea levels; and keep important infrastructure (utilities, roads, airports, wastewater plants, etc.) safe from future flooding.

One of the most efficient ways to advocate for climate change adaptation is to work on strengthening local land use plans. Surfrider staff and volunteers can influence planning efforts by identifying vulnerable coastal areas and infrastructure

threatened by storms/sea level rise; advocating for setbacks on development and managed retreat for existing infrastructure; prioritizing public access; developing and participating in restoration plans; monitoring impacts from dredge and fill and shoreline armoring projects; educating decision makers and local communities; and advocating for insurance reform that ends subsidized insurance for rebuilding in harms way.

Surfrider chapters will work closely with HQ Staff in order to track and evaluate local cleanup efforts and adaption advocacy. Because Surfrider is one of the only organizations with 'one foot on land and the other in the sea', we have a unique opportunity to build resilient communities and progressive adaption planning.

Appendix

Additional resources that may be helpful:

CDC repository of information on disaster cleanup safety:

<http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/facts.html>

OSHA factsheet on safety for Hurricane Sandy cleanup response:

https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA_FS-3610.pdf

State Organizations Supporting Post-Disaster Volunteer Management

Florida: Volunteer Florida is the lead agency for volunteers post-disaster: <https://www.volunteerflorida.org/>

Georgia: Georgia Emergency Management directs volunteers to Georgia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster: <https://gavoad.communityos.org/cms/home>

South Carolina: South Carolina Emergency Management Division directs volunteers to the United Way: <http://getconnected.uwasc.org/drm/>

North Carolina: "Ready NC" directs volunteers to several organizations (Red Cross, CERT, etc.). These include VOAD: <https://www.ncvoad.org/cms/opportunities>