

# We Face a Hurricane Season Like No Other. Communication is Key to Our Response.

By Don Hall, Director of Government Relations, OnSolve

This hurricane season is going to be different than any other because we're going to be fighting on two fronts: the other front, of course, being COVID-19. There are changes to be made to existing plans, new strategies built, partnerships shifted and more. Government and citizens alike, we're all doing things we've never done, or doing things in ways we've never done them. Now more than ever, a consistent critical communication system is fundamental to the success of our response.



HURRICANE  
EVACUATION  
ROUTE





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Good news first. We're already very good at hurricanes. We have full stockpiles, and proven processes, and we're ready for what comes. And many — but I don't, unfortunately, think most — state and local governments have effective ways to reach their constituents across multiple channels.

But let's look at a few of the extra steps, processes and actions COVID-19 adds to your hurricane response, and to your messaging.

### Changes to Sheltering

There are going to be many more shelters. Not because there are going to be more evacuees: handling volume isn't expected to be greater than normal. But there will be fewer people per shelter because of social distancing. And there's going to be a triage.

Healthy people will go to certain shelters. Infected people to other shelters. And older and health-compromised people to yet another set.

### Change to Supplies

COVID-19 presents new challenges when it comes to vendors and partners. The first is the supplies themselves. In addition to the things needed to handle the hurricane, you have to order masks, gloves and other COVID-19 supplies.

The other challenge is the supply chain itself, which will almost certainly have to expand, and which could face backlogs without proper planning on your part. The same mass notification system you use to reach your citizens builds your communications bridge to your supply chain

## Changes to Transportation

Let me share two general examples of how state and local governments are approaching this:

- 01** Cities will reduce bus capacity, give a mask to anyone without one, and take temperatures before people board. Those whose temperatures are 100° or above will go to a different shelter where they can be isolated and tested.
- 02** Another approach comes from a southeastern state department of emergency management. Here, state emergency managers are considering ways to enlist ride-sharing companies to carry people to shelters.

And the state of Texas uses its State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEARS) to provide a way for citizens to call when they need special help evacuating safely. There are a lot of steps and rules in both approaches. Citizens must know them, and they must know well in advance, to ensure the transportation process runs smoothly.

## Changes to Evacuations

The rules for hospital evacuations will change. Peter Gaynor, the head of FEMA, warns us, “Now we’ve got to make sure they evacuate the patients, the medical equipment like ventilators, pharmaceuticals that allow ventilators to be used on patients in ICUs. All those things now make it more difficult, there’s no doubt about it.”

Today, there is mounting evidence that people are not going to the hospital for life-saving treatment, out of fear of COVID-19. Worry about evacuation during a hurricane may make that worse. Communications is your best weapon; let people know you have a plan and that they will be safe.



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## Changes Start Now

The time to start communicating all of this is now, during blue sky days. A critical communication system, or mass notification system, helps earn the trust of your citizens. It's a backbone of your response, and when used effectively, could potentially be the most valuable public safety tool you have. Advertise your critical communication system and make sure citizens, vendors, providers and more all know where they can enter their contact information to receive alerts. And for those who sign up, provide regular updates as soon as you have them.

Reach out to everyone you can, using every channel you have, to let them know how you plan to care for their health and safety during the COVID-19 Hurricane Season.



**Accelerate and strengthen**  
your hurricane response.

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### About OnSolve

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