

A Mighty Wind

When it rains, it roars

By Michelle Thomson



Who would think that Southern California—a region known for its beaches, surfers, palm trees and sunny skies—could be threatened by a tornado? Particularly rare in California, where earthquakes, mudslides and wildfires are more common, tornadoes are especially unlikely to form in winter months.

Even in the center of the United States—the area that includes Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa and Texas, and what many refer to as “Tornado Alley”—tornadoes usually are the result of late spring thunderstorms.

But on a blustery January afternoon last year during a powerful El Niño storm, Orange County, Calif., beach communities were issued numerous tornado watches and warnings. And Huntington Pacific Beach House, a collection of stacked condominiums in Huntington Beach, was directly in the path forecast for the tornado.

READY FOR THE WORST

Fortunately, Huntington Pacific Beach House’s board of directors had approved a disaster emergency plan in December 2009, just one month before the storm hit. And although the association had tested and approved the plan, no one expected it would ever

What managers can do

For more information on developing an emergency plan, see *Before Disaster Strikes: Developing an Emergency Procedures Manual* at www.caionline.org/shop. Member price \$60.

need to be put into action.

Immediately after hearing the first tornado warning, Huntington’s managers contacted the area’s Lifeguard Watch Command to find out if the community was in the path of the oncoming storm.

Once they confirmed the community was in jeopardy, the association implemented the new plan: Managers called the community’s on-site maintenance crew to prepare the buildings and residents for a possible tornado.

Awnings were removed from the buildings, sandbags were placed along the bottom edges of all sliding glass doors, windows were taped to prevent glass from shattering and common-area furniture was securely stored.

COLLABORATION WITH CITY

The association also contacted the City of Huntington Beach to request that a sand berm be constructed on the beach in front of the community to prevent flooding from unusually high tides that might accompany such a storm. The city responded right away, and a berm was in place within the hour.

The Huntington community had very little time to prepare for the storm, but it accomplished—on time and in an orderly and thorough fashion—everything that needed to be done to protect the homes.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The tornado warnings occurred on a weekday—Tuesday, Jan. 19—while most residents were at work. Using an e-mail template and a distribution list created for such emergencies, man-

agers advised all owners and residents that the community was in the path of a tornado and instructed them to secure their residences and prepare to travel to higher ground in case of flooding.

Throughout the storm, management staff stayed in constant communication with the Huntington Beach Lifeguard Watch Command and monitored weather reports from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Although winds exceeded 60 mph and a water spout touched down within 500 feet of Huntington, the community’s preplanning averted any significant residential storm damage.

Once they received confirmation from the on-site maintenance crew that the danger had passed, managers sent a subsequent e-blast to residents advising them that their properties were safe and undamaged.

Managers continued to track the storm and kept a close eye on the weather in case another tornado warning was issued.

Huntington’s residents had nothing but overwhelmingly positive feedback and praise for the managers’ actions. What managers did, however, was simply a question of how they could best serve clients and protect their investments. **CM**

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