

Evacuation Clearance Times for Lee County Explained

Evacuation Clearance Time is the time necessary for people evacuate from the point when the evacuation order is issued until the last evacuee can either leave the evacuation zone, or arrive at safe shelter within the county. Due to our large population and limited road system, Southwest Florida is the hardest place in the country to evacuate in a disaster.

When evacuating for hurricanes, the time needed to evacuate is determined from studies conducted by the Florida Division of Emergency Management and Regional Planning Councils, with the assistance of Local Emergency Management agencies. These studies provide both a Base Evacuation Time for each Evacuation Zone, and an Operational Evacuation Time.

The Base Evacuation Time is the worst-case scenario with 100% of the people in each zone evacuating at the same time. The Operational Evacuation Time is based on information from the Regional Planning Councils and Local Emergency Management agencies that is specific to their Region, and County. It accounts for the behavior of residents, traffic patterns, roadway construction, etc.

Lee County Emergency Management uses these Base Evacuation Times to help determine when evacuations must be started and completed, providing everyone the opportunity to reach safe shelter within the County. Upon leaving the County, evacuation times increase dramatically, and in the case of a storm threatening Lee County requiring our residents to evacuate out of County, that evacuation would have to begin 89-hours prior to the storm force winds reaching the County. Think about all the things you would normally do in an 89-hour time period; it's three and half days of work, school, vacation, doctor's appointments, etc., and it's four breakfasts, four lunches, and three dinners.

Evacuation is as dangerous as it is serious; no evacuation is risk free. Hurricane evacuation orders are based on two primary threats: wind and surge. We recognize that "over evacuation" creates different issues, but can be as detrimental as "under evacuation." Our evacuation decision-making procedures consider the evacuation risks, the disruptions to both the lives of our residents/visitors, businesses, and the potential magnitude of the impending threat, when deciding to issue evacuation orders.

We typically use a phased approach. When orders to evacuate are issued Zone A, Mobile/Manufacture Homes, and Special Needs Registrants are the first to evacuate, and because of the phased process, may be evacuating while the weather is beautiful. This allows us time to receive better information from the National Hurricane Center, and determine which other Zones need to evacuate. It also helps reduce the number of evacuees on the roadways at the same time, providing us a little more time for movement of people.

Here are the Evacuation Times for Lee County, remember more than just your Zone may be evacuating at the same time, hence the increased time for each Zone. Resident numbers are based upon the 2010 Census & GIS Data.

Surge Evacuation Zone A – 10 to 10.5 hours
153,117 residents

Surge Evacuation Zone B – 13 to 14 hours
228,608 residents

Surge Evacuation Zone C – 19 to 20 hours
149,281 residents

Surge Evacuation Zone D – 27.5 to 32.5 hours
36,061 residents

Surge Evacuation Zone E – 35.5 to 40.5 hours
38,168 residents

Surge Evacuation Zone N/C
13,502 residents

Zone N/C is NOT calculated, and is NOT an actual Zone. This area of Lee County is currently outside the parameters of the SLOSH model run by the National Hurricane Center (NHC), which provides us the data to determine the Evacuation Zones in Lee County. In the future, the NHC will be able to account for this area of Lee County in the SLOSH model, and then it will receive the proper Zone designations.

What does this mean for you? You need to evacuate early, and no later than when the evacuation order is given. Moving people in Lee County takes quite some time, up to 41-hours, and that time only increases once you leave the county. It can take up to 89-hours to evacuate out of Southwest Florida simply because of the infrastructure. When Lee County Emergency Management issues evacuation orders, we realize the weather may be beautiful outside, however it will not be for long, and we need you to reach safety before the danger reaches our world famous beaches.