

2016 OSCEOLA HURRICANE HANDBOOK

Kissimmee Utility Authority • Category B8 Other

RESEARCH/SITUATION ANALYSIS – It only takes one storm to change your life and community. Hurricanes are among nature’s most powerful and destructive phenomena. Citizens living in areas prone to tropical cyclones like Florida need to be prepared. Even areas well away from the coastline can be threatened by dangerous flooding, destructive winds and tornadoes from these storms.

The 2015 Atlantic hurricane season was a below average season that produced 12 tropical cyclones, 11 named storms, four hurricanes and two major hurricanes, according to secondary research with the National Hurricane Center. In August, however, Tropical Storm Erika threatened Florida, and Florida Governor Rick Scott declared a state of emergency. Although the storm eventually dissipated prior to landfall, Erika posed the first significant hurricane threat to the state since Hurricane Wilma in 2005. Since that time, the state's population has grown by 2 million with many presumed to have never experienced a hurricane before, according to secondary research conducted with the Weather Channel. Some newer residents remained apathetic over the storm, dismissing it as "another excuse to skip work or school or to party," according to news reports. In short, our residents aren't properly prepared.

Secondary and primary research conducted in the spring of 2016 by Kissimmee Utility Authority staff identified a continued need for storm preparedness information, specific to Osceola County. Our experience from previous storm seasons showed us that providing preparedness information in printed form was still important, especially when power and cell service can be disrupted by a storm and citizens are no longer able to access the information they need online. But each local government agency in the county produced a separate storm guide, causing confusion and wasteful repetition in the eyes and minds of our citizens. That needed to change.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES – To effectively prepare our community for the 2016 storm season, we identified five objectives that we wished to accomplish through the guide: 1) to partner with local agencies to develop a single comprehensive hurricane preparedness guide, specific to residents of Osceola County; 2) to produce the guide over 60 days with a release by the start of hurricane season; 3) to distribute at least 60,000 copies of the guide; 4) to increase by 50 percent the number of electronic downloads of the guide from our website over 2015; and 5) to keep the cost of the guide at or below the 50 cents per utility customer, the amount budgeted.

IMPLEMENTATION – We issued three Requests For Proposal (RFP) for graphic design, printing and distribution services. To ensure the guide was as comprehensive as possible for all residents, we reached out to four partner agencies (Osceola County, the cities of Kissimmee and St. Cloud and the IFAS Extension Service) to incorporate information they wished to contribute. The result was a 40-page, well-organized, unified handbook that featured information on hurricanes, tornadoes and floods, plus helpful phone numbers, a disaster supplies checklist, safety tips and a hurricane tracking chart. Printed copies of the handbook were inserted in our local newspaper (no insertion fee) for countywide distribution. The handbook was added to the utility’s storm website – www.kua.com/hurricane – for convenient and easy download.

A news release was distributed as well as numerous posts and updates on the utility’s social media channels to promote the availability of the guide. The handbook was also featured in an edition of the utility’s monthly customer newsletter, *PowerSource*, and in a featured segment on the utility’s quarterly CEO video series, *Q4*.

EVALUATION – The 2016 season brought two tropical storms and two hurricanes to our state, the first hurricanes to make landfall in Florida in 11 years. This increased interest in the handbooks. Nearly 70,000 printed handbooks were distributed via newspaper insertion, in our customer service lobby and at a local storm expo. More than 2,350 electronic handbooks were downloaded from our website, more than double from the previous year. Nearly 150 guides were requested by email. The news release generated one feature article in a local newspaper and more than 9,592 viewed the Q4 video segment. In a survey conducted orally at the storm expo, nearly 100 percent of participants stated they intended to use the utility’s guide to help them prepare.

KUA effectively partnered with sister agencies to provide citizens with critical information on storm preparedness in a single document. Our communication effort was a success by all accepted measures – exceeding our five objectives!

In October 2016, the guide was recognized with a national award of merit in the Excellence in Public Power Communications Awards, a national competition sponsored by the American Public Power Association.

BUDGET – The cost of printing 70,000 hurricane handbooks was \$17,046.14, plus \$5,560 for graphic design and \$200 to boost a Facebook post. Total project cost: \$22,806.4 or 33 cents per utility customer (34% below our goal). Total value of staff time was an additional \$6,000 (60 hours) but was not part of the project budget.