

Risky business: Peak hurricane season meets prime filming season



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Fall is finally here, and for those in the media and entertainment industry, that means peak filming season.

As productions flock to the Gulf Coast to capitalize on state financial incentives, it means that industry risk managers, agents and brokers must simultaneously contend with peak hurricane season — a time of year that can lead to a host of weather-related filming risks. Therefore, it is imperative film makers head into production season with an understanding of their weather exposures, how best to manage these risks and, most important, have a plan to keep the cast and crew safe and out of harm's way should the need arise. The time to prepare is now.

Writing the hurricane preparedness script

Unfortunately, natural disasters such as hurricanes have continued to increase in both severity and cost. According to NOAA, two of the top five costliest hurricanes in U.S. history hit the Gulf Coast in the past two years — Irma and Harvey — totaling \$175 billion in damages. Among all recent hurricanes in the U.S., hurricane-related damage is increasingly the result of rain and flood waters, not just wind, which is, in turn, driving up loss costs. More concerning is that subsequent losses aren't limited to coastal communities, but rather reaching further inland.

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Because these storms — and their looming aftermath — are predicted to get stronger, it's vital to be prepared and equipped to mitigate the risks associated with these storms because even the best screenwriters cannot write a story with as many twists and turns as a hurricane.

Fortunately, risk managers and agents and brokers can see how the story will unfold by staying in tune with how storms are progressing. After all, a small disturbance in the Caribbean can begin as a tropical storm and quickly evolve into a powerful hurricane. By monitoring weather advisories and emergency announcements, filmmakers can stay ahead of the storm.



In the event a storm affects production, snap decisions and rush to judgment calls must be avoided. Rather, it's important producers and studio executives activate contingency protocols based on a pre-developed plan. Ideally, risk managers, agents and brokers have developed such a plan that includes the following:

- **A designated hurricane plan coordinator and staff:** The members of this team will be accountable for monitoring weather advisories and activating and implementing the plan. They should also be responsible for coordinating with civil authorities, who will ultimately make the call regarding mandatory evacuations. In the event of evacuation, local filming permits will be pulled, and a production must comply with authorities.
- **An evacuation plan and emergency contacts for all cast and crew:** When developing such a plan, leverage local authorities to help determine flood zones and pre-determined evacuation routes for the production area. From there, determine where and how cast and crew will evacuate. In some cases, this means working with hotels ahead of time to make accommodations. This part of the plan must also account for equipment and vehicle safety, as well as production offices and soundstages.
- **Disaster kits:** All cast and crew should be given information on disaster kits, which include, at a minimum, three days of supplies such as cash, fuel, first aid and medicines, food and water, flashlights and spare batteries, clothing and bedding. Naturally, what's included in the disaster kit must correspond with a broader evacuation plan.
- **A post-storm contingency plan:** This piece of the plan accounts for items such as access to another site, should

a filmmaking team be unable to return to its production offices immediately, access to generators, and as mentioned earlier, access to replacement for storm-damaged equipment.

Plans should be in writing and distributed to the cast and crew before production.

And ... action: Dealing with an active hurricane

Despite the best planning, the insurance industry can neither stop nor predict a hurricane. When one does hit, much of the financial loss during production is from interruption issues and delays. That's where having the right insurance, including a business interruption policy, can help.

While this very clearly affects the overall production timeline, behind the scenes, it also means extra days of renting equipment, overtime for cast and crew, and extended lodging. Therefore, it is imperative risk managers, agents and brokers factor these costs into their purchased extra expense limits. Failure to know the average daily cost of production when purchasing a policy can be "catastrophic" — as setting this limit too low can lead to out-of-pocket costs that can put the overall production at serious risk. Additionally, in order to be fully protected, filmmakers must ensure they can replace their daily cost for an extended period.

Outside of business interruption and extra expense insurance, it's critical to have the right property insurance, as much of the equipment used for shooting is very expensive. While some equipment can be packed up and evacuated along with the cast and crew, that won't solve everything. For bigger pieces of equipment or large sets and scenery that can't be transported, confirming that the crew is prepared with tarps and the proper storage outlets can go a long way, but damage can still happen. Thus, risk managers, agents and brokers must ensure property limits are accurate and up-to-date prior to filming to ensure there is sufficient insurance for any equipment that might be damaged in a storm.

Curtain call

Getting the perfect shot shouldn't come at the expense of the overall production, or the safety of its cast and crew. By understanding the risks that go hand-in-hand with hurricane season, properly preparing for contingencies before and after the storm, and securing the right insurance products and services, the cast of risk managers, agents and brokers can help produce the next blockbuster.