

City to hand out rules as islanders return

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GALVESTON — All island residents will be allowed to return Wednesday, starting at 6 a.m.

People who live west of the end of the seawall must leave by 6 p.m., when the curfew goes into effect.

Officials expect traffic to be backed up for miles as police officers stop every car to hand out fliers with information about what they can expect to experience as they begin cleaning up their homes.

As of Monday evening, officials did not have a plan to lessen the traffic jam, expected by some to extend all the way to Houston. But city leaders are working to develop some way to speed the progress, said Alicia Cahill, city spokeswoman.

The city's 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew will remain in effect until further notice.

City officials will hand out the following information to residents returning to the island Wednesday:

Traffic Control

Watch for out debris, equipment, power lines, rough pavement and dismantled roadways and bridges

Drive cautiously — obey all speed limits.

Be conscientious of other vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Treat all intersections as a four-way stop.

Street signs may or may not be present, so remain alert when driving.

Do not talk on your cell phone while driving.

Barricaded streets will change daily.

Fires

Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas signed an order banning residents from using open flames or lighting fires anywhere on the island.

Burning trash is strictly prohibited. Residents should keep all heat sources away from generators.

Officials say 40 structures burned during and after Hurricane Ike made landfall.

Beaches

Residents are no longer banned from the island's beaches, but they are not allowed to play in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The water must be tested for contamination before it can be declared safe for swimming, officials said.

Sanitary Sewer Service

To report sewage problems or overflows, call 409-797-3630.

Water Conservation

Don't flush unless you must.

Do not wash your car.

Do not water your yard.

City Water Service

- A boil water notice is in effect until further notice.
- Water service has been restored to most areas behind the Seawall.
- Do not drink any water from a city water tap.
- Do not allow your pet to drink from a city water tap.
- Do not brush your teeth with tap water.
- Water is only for bathing and flushing toilets.
- Conserve water. Use it sparingly until service has been restored.
- Report all water leaks. Call 409-765-3710.

Natural Gas Service

Do not attempt to turn on natural gas meters or use natural gas appliances. Tampering with meters or gas facilities could delay service restoration efforts and cause further damage or serious injury.

Pressure testing of all gas lines is required prior to turning on gas valves. A licensed plumber can file the required permit from the city and complete the test in coordination with the city's plumbing inspector. Once the safety inspection is complete, the city will contact Texas Gas Service to restore the natural gas service to your home or business.

If you smell gas, leave and call 800-959-5325.

To have service restored, call 800-700-2443.

Electric Power Service

Step 1: Assess the property.

Determine if any physical storm damage to your structure exists to your roof, ceiling or light fixtures. Determine if you have water damage inside your home or outside at the breaker box. Check to see if you have trees leaning on power lines.

Step 2: Turn on the breaker.

If you have determined your structure has not sustained damage that could interfere with electrical circuits begin by turning on one breaker at a time. If you hear any strange noises turn the breaker off immediately. If everything sounds normal, move on to the next breaker and turn it on as well. Continue to check each breaker one at a time only advancing as long as normal conditions persist.

You must remain on site for the next several hours to monitor electrical power in your home.

If you notice smoke, fire or hear popping noises at any time immediately turn off the main breaker to the structure.

If you have obvious water damage:

- If your structure sustained water damage of 10 inches or more, do not turn on the circuit.
- Do not use any light sockets that were submerged by floodwaters until a registered electrician can evaluate or replace them.
- Do not re-energize an electric panel if it was fully or partially submerged in floodwaters.

If you have any visual damage to your structure contact an electrical contractor who is registered with the City of Galveston before attempting to turn on your power.

Simple Tips To Avoid Falling Prey To Schemes And Faulty Labor

Ask to see your remodeler's license and proof of insurance. All residential and commercial contractors must be registered with the City of Galveston.

If the cost of the residential remodeling work amounts to more than \$10,000, remodelers must be registered with the Texas Residential Construction Commission (TRCC) and the city.

Homeowners should never pay for the entire job up front. Negotiate a payment schedule with your contractor based on performance or task completion. Be suspicious if the remodeler asks for cash payment before starting the job. Always pay by check so you retain a record of your payment.

Request a list of references. Verify that previous clients were satisfied with their work.

Talk to more than one company and compare bids. If one contractor returns a noticeably lower bid resist the temptation to immediately hire that business. Low prices don't always guarantee quality work. Contractors who cut costs on materials to secure their next job could leave the unsuspecting homeowner with costly repairs down the road.

Ask for a written estimate before signing a contract or making down payments. Never sign a blank contract. Your agreement should outline everything related to the work.

Professional contractors will adhere to city building codes and submit a permit application to the Planning and Community Development Department for approval. Be wary if a remodeler tells you city codes and permits have been waived due to the emergency. Call the city to verify that information for yourself.

City Permits For Construction

Permits are required for all work on your property with some exceptions.

The following permits have been temporarily exempted:

- Interior removal of flooring.
- Interior removal of wall materials.
- Interior removal of ceiling covers.
- Interior removal of cabinetry.

The City of Galveston's Permit Office is temporarily at the Galveston County Criminal Justice Center, 601 54th St.

Please contact Planning and Community Development staff with questions about building codes and permits.

The City of Galveston is making all efforts to expedite building permits for emergency repairs. The city will have inspectors in the field to answer questions and monitor construction to ensure it is properly formatted.

Health Precautions And Advisories

- Only drink bottled water.
- If you experience diarrhea, have open punctures or cuts that won't heal, or trouble breathing seek medical care immediately.
- Wash hands with soap before eating.
- Use hand sanitizing gels frequently.
- Residents exposed to flood waters and debris removal should receive the following immunizations: Tetanus, Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.

The University of Texas Medical Branch and other island health clinics are offering immunizations to the public.

If you require medical attention, please go to the medical branch's emergency room. Use the Harborside entrance. It can fill prescriptions, provide immunizations and give minor medical care.

The medical branch is not open as a full-service hospital.

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