



Child Care Licensing Fact Sheet

Operating a Child Care Program Following a Hurricane, Fire, or Natural Disaster



Guidelines for Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff and program owners, operators, and directors of child care facilities and family day care homes (licensed, large, or registered) during a natural disaster recovery period.

After a hurricane, fire, or natural disaster, the Florida Administrative Code requires the owner, operator or director of a child care facility or home to notify the licensing office as to their status of operation in order for the licensing authority to ensure that health and safety standards for continued operation have been met.

If the child care facility/home has NO structural damage with FULL electrical service and the water and sewage/septic tank are working properly, it should be business as usual if the location and surrounding area has been cleared for access by the Emergency Management Team.

If the child care facility/home has NO structural damage and NO electricity; however, the water and sewage/septic tank are working properly, the program may operate if lighting needs are met using either batteries or a generator.

Caution: Generators, if used, must be located outdoors away from windows and doors. Exhaust can easily cause carbon monoxide poisoning if it enters the building or home. The generator must also be inaccessible to children.

Under NO circumstances are candles, open flames, gas or fuel lanterns to be used.

If the child care facility/home SUSTAINS DAMAGE, regardless of the extent, on-site inspections are required PRIOR to opening. Licensing staff must ensure the structure is sound, no live wires or open sewage exist, etc. For DCF staff, these inspections may be accomplished in collaboration with other departments or agencies.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND REMEMBER:

- A. If water service is disrupted, water used for drinking/cooking must be purchased (i.e. bottled water). Water used for hand washing, cleaning, etc. must have 8 drops of bleach to each gallon of water and sit for 30 minutes before use, or water may be vigorously boiled for five minutes before use. Consult with your local health department for additional requirements or information.
- B. Provisions must be made for the facility/home to be kept cool and comfortable when children are in care. Fans may be appropriate; however, they must have safety features and kept out of the reach of children.
- C. If flooding has occurred within the facility/home, clean up must occur before allowing children in care, including the disposal or sanitization of any toys and equipment.
- D. Consultation with the local health department is critical with regard to sewage contamination and septic tank capacity, damage, and stress created by excessive rains, flooding, and standing water.
- E. Outdoor areas must be safe for play and free from debris. Do not allow children to play near downed power lines or flooded areas. Programs may be allowed to reopen even if outdoor areas are not useable; however, approval by the licensing authority is required and children must be kept out of that play area completely or by setting up temporary fencing/barriers to prohibit access.
- F. For food preparation in the absence of electrical power, pre-packaged foods that do not require refrigeration should be used and made available. Consult with your local health department on alternate meal planning and safe storage of foods.

- G. Regardless of circumstances, staff-to-child ratios must be maintained to provide appropriate supervision particularly with these additional distractions.
- H. Children may be accepted on a temporary basis; however, the licensed capacity may NEVER be exceeded. Enrollment information is required and contact numbers are extremely critical. Complete medical record requirements may be waived temporarily until the emergency situation has passed.

AGENCY COLLABORATION: The following agencies should be consulted and called upon for assistance during times of recovery: (please fill-in the appropriate telephone number for your area)

Local licensing office/licensing counselor: _____

Local Resource and Referral Agency (R&R): _____

Early Learning Coalition: _____

Local health department: _____

Local fire department: _____

If children are to be moved to alternate sites, child care providers are responsible for notifying the local licensing authority for confirmation that the site is appropriate, as well as informing the parents. Both licensing staff and the provider should work with their local Resource and Referral agency to help get the message out, to confirm location changes, and to ensure all children are provided care.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- www.myflorida.com/cf_web (DCF website - provides office closures and other information for affected counties around the state)
- www.doh.state.fl.us (DOH website - provides hurricane information on health issues including drinking water safety and other precautions)
- www.floridadisaster.org (provides evacuations and closings around the state, helpful advance planning information, etc.)
- www.redcross.org (disaster preparedness on many types of disasters, tracking information, safety checklists and safety information)

Each and every situation must be assessed on an individual basis and determinations made based on protecting the health, safety and well-being of the children in care.

