



# Storm Surge

A storm surge is a large dome of water, often 50 to 100 miles wide, that rises anywhere from 4 to 5 feet in a Category 1 hurricane and up to more than 30 feet in a Category 5 storm. Storm surge arrives prior to a hurricane's landfall, and the greater the hurricane's intensity, the sooner the surge arrives. Storm surge can be devastating to coastal regions, causing flooding, severe beach erosion, and property damage along the immediate coast. Furthermore, water can rise very rapidly due to storm surge, posing a serious threat to people remaining in inundation areas.

## Local Planning and Regulations

### SS-1 Adopt Building Codes and Development Standards

**Building codes and development standards can be established to mitigate storm surge damage. Possible regulations include:**

- Adopting the International Building Code (IBC) and International Residential Code (IRC).
- Adopting ASCE-24-05 *Flood Resistant Design and Construction*. ASCE 24, created by the American Society of Civil Engineers, is a referenced standard in the IBC that specifies minimum requirements and expected performance for the design and construction of buildings and structures in flood hazard areas to make them more resistant to flood loads and flood damage.
- Establishing design standards for buildings located in areas susceptible to storm surge.
- Implementing V-zone construction requirements for new development located in coastal A-zones.
- Adopting building requirements for higher elevation in inundation zones.
- Requiring open foundations (e.g., piles or piers) in coastal areas.
- Requiring deep foundations in order to avoid erosion and scour.

### SS-2 Improve Land Use Planning and Regulations

**Land uses should be planned and regulated to minimize the impact of storm surge. Possible measures to implement include:**

- Developing and maintaining a beach management plan.
- Adopting shoreline setback regulations and establishing coastal setback lines.
- Adopting coastal zone management regulations.
- Eliminating all obstructions in areas along the coast subject to inundation by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood event with additional hazards associated with storm-induced waves (also known as the V-zone).
- Planning for future storm surge heights due to sea level rise.
- Limiting or prohibiting development in areas along the coast subject to inundation by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood event with additional hazards associated with storm-induced waves (referred to as the V-zone on Flood Insurance Rate Maps).
- Adopting coastal A-zones, areas of special flood hazard that extend inland and are subject to breaking waves between 1.5 and 3 feet, and ensuring that they are mapped accurately.
- Adopting and enforcing coastal A-zones in A-zones.

### SS-3 Minimize Risk to New Facilities and Infrastructure

*FEMA Resources/Publications*  
*FEMA P-55, P-499, B-797*

**Infrastructure and critical facilities can be protected from storm surge damage through the following:**

- Locating future critical facilities outside of areas susceptible to storm surge.
- Requiring that all critical facilities meet requirements of Executive Order 11988 and be built 1 foot above the 500-year flood elevation (considering wave action).

## SS-4 Map and Assess Vulnerability to Storm Surge

Storm surge risk can be better assessed and monitored with mapping techniques, including the following:

- Using GIS to map areas that are at risk to inundation by storm surge.
- Developing and maintaining a database to track community vulnerability to storm surge.

## Structure and Infrastructure Projects

### SS-5 Construct Structural Control Techniques

Structural controls can be used to lessen the impact of storm surge. Examples include the following:

- Constructing groins to capture material along the shoreline in order to trap and retain sand.
- Installing geotextile sand tubes to trap sand or protect beachfront properties.
- Building a coastal berm to absorb waves and protect the shoreline from erosion.
- Building a storm berm to keep rock protection in place and provide a slow supply of sediment to the coastal system.

### SS-6 Protect Infrastructure and Critical Facilities

*FEMA Resources/Publications*  
*FEMA P-55, P-499, B-797*

Infrastructure and critical facilities can be protected from damage by storm surge through the following:

- Reorienting near-shore roads so they are parallel (not perpendicular) to the beach to prevent the channelization of storm surge and wind inland.
- Constructing seawalls or other structures to protect critical facilities located on the shoreline.
- Relocating existing vulnerable critical facilities outside of high-risk areas.

## Natural Systems Protection

### SS-7 Protect and Restore Natural Buffers

Natural resources provide floodplain protection, riparian buffers, and other ecosystem services that mitigate storm surge risk. It is important to preserve such functionality with the following:

- Examining the appropriate use of beach nourishment, sand scraping, dune-gap plugs, etc., for coastal hazards.
- Implementing dune restoration, plantings (e.g., sea oats), and use of natural materials.
- Evaluating the appropriate use of sediment-trapping vegetation, sediment mounds, etc., for coastal hazards.
- Planting sediment-trapping vegetation to make the coast more resistant to coastal storms by collecting sediment in protective features such as dunes or barrier islands.
- Performing sand scraping—using bulldozers to deposit the top foot of sand above the high-tide line—to reinforce the beach without adding new sand.
- Using sediment mounds to act as artificial dunes or plugs for natural dune gaps in order to slow the inland progress of storm-related wind and water.

## Education and Awareness Programs

### SS-8 Provide Information on High-Risk Areas

Increase public awareness of storm surge risk through the following actions:

- Offering GIS hazard mapping online for residents and design professionals.
- More accurately mapping problem areas to educate residents about unanticipated risks. Upgrading maps provides a truer measure of risks to a community.
- Educating property owners in high-risk areas about mitigation options.
- Educating the public about risks, preparedness measures, and evacuation procedures.

*Other storm surge-related mitigation actions may also apply to other hazards. See the sections entitled “Flood” and “Multiple Hazards” for other possible ideas..*