

## **Storm Isaias Press Conference**

**Saturday, August 1, 2020**

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information of Volusia County

**George Recktenwald** – Volusia County Manager

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

**Ray Manchester** – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

**Mike Chitwood** – Volusia County Sheriff

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, Community Information Director for Volusia County government, and this is the 5:15 p.m. briefing for Saturday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, for hurricane Isaias. With us today is County Manager, George Recktenwald; Emergency Management Director, Jim Judge; Beach Safety Director, Ray Manchester, and joining us virtually is Sheriff Mike Chitwood.

With that we will move right to it. We will move to Sheriff Chitwood who is joining us remotely. Sheriff, take it away.

**Mike Chitwood** – Volusia County Sheriff

Kevin, thank you, and good afternoon to all of Volusia County. From the Sheriff's perspective I can let you know that while I won't be on the field leading the forces, we are in very capable hands. We have extra deputies on patrol. We have extra folks inside of dispatch. We are coordinating closely with our County Manager, George Recktenwald, and with our Emergency Management Director, Jim Judge. From a personal standpoint, if you haven't got out yet to get supplies, or if you are thinking that this is going to be a non-event that is the worst thing that you can do. Complacency is deadly. So, I would encourage everybody that after you listen to all the information that is going to be presented, to get out, get a full tank of gas, go get the essentials that you'll need, as soon or before you'll have to hunker down for four days. Follow the weather closely. This is going to hit at nighttime and I am sure that Jim Judge is going to

tell us if there is going to be any type of possibility of tornados, especially on the east coast part of the County.

So, again, don't be complacent. If it's a non-event, great. But use this as an opportunity to stock up on supplies. And, we have a little bit of a window here. You have tonight and you probably have half of a day tomorrow to get those things done.

So, we are ready and we are looking forward to working with all of the other entities of Volusia County to make sure we all get through this safely.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Sheriff. We will move on to County Manager, George Recktenwald.

**George Recktenwald** – Volusia County Manager

Thank you. Thank you everyone. And, thank you Sheriff Chitwood, those are very wise words. And, I just want to say as this hurricane approaches the eastern coast of Florida, you should really be making, right now, those final preparations. We have good weather out there; take advantage of it, and finish preparing for this storm. And, people need to pay attention. This is going to be a storm that is going to be very, very close to us. I know we've had larger menacing storms in recent history and they were farther out to sea, and this is something that people need to pay attention to, as this storm could literally be right on our coast.

As a little bit of a guide, most people may not realize this County for the most part has only ever really experienced hurricane force winds in the low 90 mile an hour range. So, we've only really had a category one hurricane, even though we've had some monsters come close to us, that's actually ever touched us. This is a smaller storm, however it's going to be much closer, and may actually be right upon us on the coast. So, in just a minute I will have Jim Judge come up and give more details on the storm and what you can expect here in the County.

I do want to let everybody know that County forces have been very busy and we are prepared for this. Public Works has checked the areas where we see routine flooding and to see that the storm culverts and ditches are clear. They've lowered retention ponds to compensate for additional water. Our beach

and coastal teams have secured all of their assets from trash receptacles to toll booths, to lifeguard stands. Road and bridge tree crews have all of their equipment in place to quickly clear the roads. And, they will also be imbedding as we have done in the past, with Florida Light and Power and Duke crews, to address power outages to get the power on as soon as possible.

Our emergency management team continues to participate in meetings and conference calls multiple times a day with city and state officials. So I would like to again remind everyone, now you should be making your plan and you should be taking action. According to the current forecast we are just about 24 hours away from the onset of tropical storm force winds. So, again, I need everyone to pay attention and use some common sense. Depending on the track, the barrier islands could see category one hurricane force winds up to 75 miles an hour. So, with that in mind, we are going to issue a voluntary evacuation order effective as of 8:00 a.m. tomorrow, Sunday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, for the Barrier Island and also people living in mobile homes along the coast. This is really meant for people who are not comfortable in riding out the storm where you are, and now, like I say, is the time. So, you need to be calling Uncle Fred, or your friends or whomever lives farther inland and visit those folks, or possibly book a hotel if you are able to. So, we are really encouraging that during the current pandemic situation to shelter in place with family or friends.

Now, we realize not everyone will have that opportunity so we will open, and Jim will go over that, some public shelters for those who cannot remain in their current situation and really have no other place to go. With that I am going to invite up Jim Judge, to provide an update on the storm and give a little more detail on what we are doing with sheltering. Thank you.

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

Thank you Mr. Recktenwald. Again, Jim Judge, Volusia County Emergency Management. So, just a little bit of an update on the hurricane. It is moving up the coast right now. It had moved at approximately 12 miles an hour earlier, but it is down to eight miles an hour, and literally it has wobbled a little bit more to the west towards the coast, and really, only a little more than ten miles off shore. There is some fluctuation, has been and will be as we monitor this storm. At times it falls below hurricane force winds and then a short time later it's back up in those 74, 75 mile an hour wind range. So for coastal Volusia County we are under a hurricane warning. We are all under a storm surge watch. And, also, we have an interior Volusia County tropical storm watch. So, winds, we can expect really the low end hurricane

force winds right along the coast and that is anticipated to occur literally Sunday night around 11:00 p.m. and that will last until about 7:00 a.m. in the morning. Once the system passes north of Volusia County we expect the conditions to improve greatly, because it is not like one of the typical hurricanes that we need to wait quite a while for once the center passes to the north, for all of that southern system to pass with it. So to the south of it, it's not that active.

Also, the onset of sustained tropical storm force winds will occur approximately 3:00 o'clock tomorrow. Always give and take about an hour depending on forward speed. But, around 3:00 p.m. tropical storm force sustained winds will come into the Oak Hill area and then of course move to the north.

Storm surge still approximately one to three feet in storm surge so it's not a real big storm surge event. And again this is more of a wind event. You know, we've had wind events, we've had water events, and with hurricane Matthew it was both a wind and a water event. So, this is particularly a wind event for us. There is an area around Ponce Inlet, maybe a little bit to the south of the inlet a little bit to the north that could experience a three foot storm surge.

Rainfall, still approximately two to four inches along the coast and one to two inches inland. So, with that obviously we've got some pretty gusty sustained winds and also some large gusts that will come in to 75, 80 mile an hour as they move through. So, it's a good opportunity right now to take down the wind chimes, bring down the plants, anything that could be an object that could fly around, you want to secure those items.

Look after your neighbors. If you have elderly neighbors that need a little bit of assistance, it is a good opportunity to provide a little bit of assistance to them. But again, if you are going to secure all those items you will be in better shape, so you don't end up with something going through a window. Because, again, we always say, you want to hide from the winds. So, if you have a good secure home, as Mr. Recktenwald stated, that's a good place to stay. If you have the opportunity to put up some plywood, that's even better. And certainly it is a long way to the end of hurricane season and so you may want to even consider purchasing some of those manufactured storm shutters for your home. And, that even makes you that much more secure. And right now it is so important to continue monitoring this system because it has wobbled. It will wobble again, and then the track and intensity can certainly change as we get into the overnight hours and into tomorrow morning.

We will have an additional National Weather Service briefing this evening at 5:45 and then they will continue to update us. As Mr. Recktenwald mentioned it is a good time to go visit your uncle in Mt. Dora.

Certainly hotel rooms are available in the west side of the county, staying with family and friends, however, if you are in an RV, recreational vehicle, mobile home, or you are in an area along the coast, that you feel may not be the best place to be, we do have public shelters that will open at 8:00 o'clock tomorrow morning. Two of those shelters are going to be special needs shelters. One is Galaxy Middle and the other one is Freedom Elementary, both of them in DeLand. They are on the west side; that is where we want them because of the wind potential on the east side. But again, if you are going to go to a special needs shelter, those are wonderful because if you have an oxygen concentrator and are concerned about an electrical appliance and you are able to plug that oxygen concentrator in, and both of those schools are generator back up. So, that is important to know.

So, if you are coming to a shelter again tomorrow morning, 8:00 o'clock, Freedom Elementary and Galaxy Middle in DeLand, but also the Volusia County Fairgrounds is a pet-friendly shelter. So, that is primarily pet-friendly. And also for individuals who need to shelter who do not have a valid ID, because we do check ID's as those individuals come into a public shelter, we have arrangements for them also at the fairgrounds.

And of course taking all of the COVID-19 precautions: mandatory face coverings, hand washing, everyone will be issued the hand sanitizer. Also, social distancing. Traditionally individuals get 20 square feet, with COVID-19 we have expanded that to 60 square feet. So, where we might be able to put a lot of special needs folks in one shelter, it's best to spread out and do that social distancing to two locations there.

Then also at the DeLand High School, that will be our general population shelters. So, if you need a place to go and you don't have a pet, DeLand High School will be the way to go. That, and all of those shelters will open at 8:00 a.m. Please don't get there any earlier. Staff will be there and we've moved a lot of supplies and equipment today to be ready to open the doors right at 8:00 o'clock. And, we do have a number of hours before that inclement weather will be upon us toward mid-day so that is important to remember.

You know, and also what to bring to a shelter. You know, when you get that 60 square feet in a general population center, you know, what you bring is what you are going to have. So think of an aluminum

lawn chair that you can take to the beach and fold out, a good book to read. You know these shelters can be somewhat noisy. A good book again, maybe some ear buds with some music to listen to, so something to keep yourself occupied. You want to have something to eat before you go to that shelter in the morning. Don't get to the shelter hungry. Food will be provided at all the shelters as always, but again, it's good to bring snacks and a little extra food for yourself as well. And of course if you go to [Volusia.org/emergency](http://Volusia.org/emergency), there's a great deal of information you can pull up about what to bring with you to the shelter. Of course, if you have COVID-19 or are symptomatic, we would prefer you not come to a public shelter and seek isolation in a different location.

With that, our bridges do shut down at 39 mile an hour sustained winds. We've been on conference calls with the Sheriff's Office, Daytona Beach, Ormond Beach, and Port Orange, to make sure everyone is in synch with those closures. Then we have to coordinate with DOT after the storm to make sure those bridges are safe to use, and we have that coordinated as well.

So, again, the storm is coming up the coast, only ten miles off shore at this point, category one conditions along the coast and minimal storm surge, two to four inches of rain, but again, the worst conditions will be 11:00 p.m., give or take an hour, Sunday night, and then through the night hopefully clearing up by 7:00 o'clock Monday morning. And, again, everybody should be hunkered down safely have their home and things put together, certainly by early afternoon tomorrow, as we get those onset of tropical storm force winds. You know, you don't want to wait until the last minute to put up your shutters if you do have them. Be careful, we've already had a couple people fall off of a roof today, so just be cognizant of your own safety and get those things done. If you've got some more work to get done, finish it up tonight, or first thing in the morning, before we get the onset of those tropical storm force winds. So, with that let me introduce Mr. Ray Manchester, the Director of Beach Services.

**Ray Manchester** – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

Good afternoon, Ray Manchester, Beach Services Director. Today about 2:00 o'clock we suspended beach driving on the beach. We closed those eastbound gates and that allows our staff and the Coastal staff time to get out there and secure those assets that Mr. Recktenwald was talking about. Those toll booths, the garbage cans, our lifeguard tower, signs and barricades, and everything that can and will blow away or float away. So, we are currently working on that, and so we anticipate that we are not going to have any driving tomorrow obviously when the surf picks up and everything tomorrow. We are

flying a red flag as we speak and have had several rescues today. We anticipate continuing to fly the red flag. We will not fly a red flag unless it is a hard closure, so we do expect people to be at the beach but it won't be open to driving. If people are coming to the beach we ask them to swim in front of a lifeguard tower obviously, but I am going to highly discourage people from getting in the water. If you do, maybe stay about knee deep water. It's going to be pretty rough out there and there is going to be all kinds of rip currents. We will have lifeguard staff out there tomorrow but not in the numbers that you would normally expect at this time of year. We will have our full-time staff out there obviously with the trucks and everything and they will be patrolling and doing what they can to keep an eye on everything as much as possible.

If and when we do get to the beach opening part, I'd like everybody to know that in order to re-open the beach a lot of things have to happen. We are obviously in turtle season and this kind of event is kind of early and we have about 700 plus turtle nests on the beach. If they are impacted by the tide, turtle staff will have to come out and find those again and remark them, and make sure they are okay. So, the beach will not be open to vehicles before that happens.

Also, we have approximately 1,500 of the conservation poles out there. Those designate the conservation area where vehicles can't go. If any of those get washed out or washed away, we have to replace those. We cannot let vehicles on the beach until that happens.

And, last but not least, those tollbooths that we talked about, those have to come back out also. And, it is not so much as to collect the toll for the vehicles, but there is another HPC mandate that when a person enters the beach in a vehicle, that driver is handed some environmental literature. So, that is a requirement. We ask the public to have patience with us because there are a lot of moving parts that have to occur to reopen the beach.

The surf being what it is we are hoping, we are actually hoping for a little bit of high surf, because as you know we've had some soft sand and some traffic lane issues lately, so we are hoping that we get just enough surf to clean up the beach a little bit, so when we do get to reopen we will have that hard packed sand that we are all used to and it makes driving conditions a lot easier for everybody.

That's it for me. If anyone has any questions, or Kevin, back to you.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information of Volusia County

We have a couple of questions here from Spectrum 13, directed to Jim.

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

**Question 1:** Thank you. Mr. Judge, the governor mentioned earlier that Volusia County is one of nine counties to have gotten PPE for shelters should they need to be opened. Can you talk a little bit about what Volusia got from that?

**Answer 1:** Absolutely. We've put together quite a bit of PPE for shelters. Of course, you know, this was just one storm. We've got months of hurricane season left, so we do have enough PPE put together for not only this storm but possibly other storms coming our way. We've got hand sanitizer, we literally got five-gallon buckets full, and with the help of Corrections inmates, we've been able to put those into small bottles that can be handed out to each individual that comes into the shelter. We have the masks. We have the hand sanitizer. The cleaning stations/washing stations. And, all the disinfectants necessary to be able to keep these shelters clean and disinfected. And then also in the shelter, having a designated safety officer to also monitor the social distancing, make sure that everyone is following proper hygiene, and just remind everybody to just wash their hands. We've got a lot of signage that we put together that we are placing in and around the restrooms and around the building just to remind everyone to take those necessary precautions.

**Question 2:** Do you anticipate reaching capacity in any of these shelters?

**Answer 2:** You know, that is a good question. We just really don't know. We are trying to track what is happening in South Florida, and how many folks are coming to the shelters, and it has been minimal, which I think is a good thing. You know, but with the phone calls that we are getting from a lot of our special needs clients who have concerns with oxygen regulating equipment, we wanted to be cautious and have two special needs shelters open. They are enough to accommodate 224 individuals. Again, generator powered, Health Department provides the medical oversight and so those individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living, they have those oxygen concentrators, they can safely shelter, plugging those in. But, there is nothing like staying at home. You know, anything can happen? A branch can come down and take out the power, but hopefully this won't be a big problem for the electrical grid, Duke or LPL. From what I understand, they are already staged over at The Speedway. You

know the, both Florida Power and Light, and Duke Energy, have been in touch with me, almost daily, as we monitor the conditions together. Of course they have both done a number of upgrades to the grid and they are good partners. And, so, they are staged in the area with resources, so should we lose power in the area, they are ready to go to work.

**Question 3:** I was going to ask if you knew how many trucks are staged at The Speedway, or will be staged.

**Answer 3:** I don't have that information. They usually bring in quite a few, and they not only help the north end of Brevard, Flagler and also Inland Lake; it's just a great facility to stage. The Speedway is just a wonderful partner, so we usually get quite a few trucks. So, I don't have an account yet of how many or what we can expect through the day tomorrow. Thank you.

**Question 4:** Jim, just one question. You had mentioned earlier about people who are COVID-19 positive and you would prefer that they did not go to the shelters. For people who are COVID-19 positive who need somewhere to go is . . .

**Answer 4:** Hotels are available on the west side. There are several hotels that will take those individuals in. If they make contact with a hotel, let them know that they are COVID positive. They literally can walk in, pick up a key, handle any billing or charging information and literally go in, pick up a key and go to their room.

**Question 5:** So that would be the counsel for people who are COVID-19 positive?

**Answer 5:** Not symptomatic, they simply tested positive, they need to leave the home that they are in and shelter somewhere safe and isolate somewhere safe. Our recommendation would be a hotel room somewhere on the west side of town.

**Question 6:** And, just because I don't know this and I'd always be looking for a deal myself, is the County picking up the tab for those hotel rooms or do they have to pick it up themselves?

**Answer 6:** They have to pick it up themselves, but the State has come out with a State/Federal Declaration that will allow for 75% reimbursement for mass care and for sheltering, so we are looking at that right now. And, we are reaching out to hotels. We have a couple out in DeBary, one in DeLand, and so we will make the information available should it be needed. (Thank you.) You bet.

**Question 7:** Do you know how many people per shelter are going to be allowed this year versus the normal? Do you know how many people are going to be allowed in each shelter, you know, versus what the normal amount would be?

**Answer 7:** Well, you know, with normal sheltering it would be 20 square feet per individual, so we are going with 60 square feet. So, if we had a large storm, Cat 2, 3, coming in, storm surge and all of the worst case situations, we would have to use probably all 32 schools, if we had a large evacuation, Barrier Island, RV Parks, you name it, then we would need all 32 of those schools plus the Fairgrounds. Plus, we also have Daytona State College, who has stepped up as well, and have facilities that we could use if necessary. So, a lot of resources out there that we could draw upon. Worst case scenario, and we do have them in cue if needed.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Jim. I'd like to thank all of our speakers.

Individuals with questions are encouraged to call the Citizens Information Center. That number is 866-345-0345. The Citizens Information Center will be open today through 6:00 p.m., then again tomorrow, Sunday, and also Monday, throughout the day, to answer any questions during the storm. Again, that number is 866-345-0345. Another good source for storm information is available at [Volusia.org/Isaias](http://Volusia.org/Isaias). With that we will close this evening's conference. Take care, stay safe, and help your neighbors.