



More links >

- Portraits of war

News links >

Today's stories
Metro
Wayne
Oakland
Macomb
Community Free Press
Michigan
Nation/World
Education
Children First
Politics
Health
Religion
Obituaries
Driving Today
AP wire
Desiree Cooper
Brian Dickerson
More columnists
Special projects

Quick links >

Home page
Site index
View the front page
Weather
Lottery
Comics
Photos
Reprints
Getting it straight
Movie listings
Restaurant guide
Search
Archives
Death notices
Personals
Auto news
Newspaper subscriptions
About the Free Press
Free Press Jobs Page
Bookstore

Nation / World

E-MAIL THIS STORY | PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT

CIVIL DEFENSE: Cuba's disaster plans praised

Emphasis saves lives, experts say

September 12, 2005

BY SUSAN TAYLOR MARTIN
ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Before Hurricane Ivan whipped Cuba last year with 160 m.p.h. winds, the government evacuated nearly 2 million people. The result: not a single death or serious injury.

Although it is a small, poor country in the heart of hurricane alley, Cuba is widely acknowledged to do an exemplary job of protecting its 11.3 million residents from natural disasters. Its record is even more impressive in light of the catastrophic loss of life that the United States -- the world's richest and most technologically advanced nation -- is experiencing from Hurricane Katrina.

"Cuba has not only an evacuation plan but an overall plan for hurricanes and other disasters that is very well developed and organized," said Dusan Zupka, who works in disaster planning for the United Nations.

"I would dare to say that Cuba is a good example for other countries in terms of preparedness and prevention."

Cuba's form of government -- communist and authoritarian -- undoubtedly helps it to quickly mobilize in emergencies. But the real key to success is a "culture of safety" in which people at all levels of government and society are committed to reducing risks and saving lives, according to a study by Oxfam, a charity that works in ravaged areas worldwide.

"The single most important thing about disaster response in Cuba is that people cooperate en masse," the study found.

As Hurricane Georges approached in 1998, a foreign aid worker living in Havana was astonished by the attention to preparedness, she told Oxfam.

"We had a steady stream of neighbors ... counseling us to fill the bathtub with water, tape the windows, unplug all electrical items, get batteries or candles and put the car in the garage."

Instruction in disaster preparedness begins in grade school. Under a 1976 law, every adult receives civil defense training.

Before a new hurricane season starts on June 1, authorities review and revise disaster plans based on the prior year's experience. In

ADVERTISE

- [Place a Classified Ad](#)
- [How to Advertise](#)

CLASSIFIEDS

- [Find a Home](#)
- [Find an Apartment](#)
- [Vacation Properties](#)
- [Boats, Motorcycles, RVs](#)
- [New & Used Cars & Trucks](#)



micareerbuilder

SHOPPING


shopLocal

Find the best sales & deals at major retailers near you:

- Target
- Circuit City
- Mervyn's
- Bass Pro
- Home Depot
- Shops
- Sears
- Jo-Ann Stores
- Pansian

[FIND MORE RETAILERS](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



POOR SLEEP?

If you are a woman 45-55 years old, you may qualify to participate in a sleep research study.

May, the entire country goes through a two-day hurricane drill, called Meteoro.

Most important, all those living in high-risk areas know beforehand where to take refuge -- in sturdy homes on high ground or in group shelters, usually schools.

All forms of transportation -- buses, helicopters, even horse carts -- are pressed into service to get people to shelter. Every shelter is stocked with food, water and medical supplies.

When a hurricane threatens, Cuba mobilizes under National Civil Defense, which coordinates preparedness from the federal level on down. There are continuous storm updates broadcast on radio and television from the country's meteorology institute.

Cuba revamped its civil defense system after a 1963 hurricane killed more than 1,000 people. Since then, disaster planning has been so finely honed that just 16 lives were lost between 1996 and 2002, despite six hurricanes.



[email this](#) | [print this](#)

Related stories >

- LOCAL EFFECTS: Michigan gas prices hold steady for now
- How to keep up, and what you can do
- Anonymous diary details election of Benedict XVI
- CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE: State's representatives offer plans
- ANOTHER DISASTER IN THE MAKING: Even before landing, Rita's destructive power terrifies
- Rita developments
- PAYING FOR REBUILDING: Hurricane recovery costs make U.S. deficit worse
- Palestinian rally ends in death
- Across the nation
- 2 more GIs die in Iraq at militant stronghold
- Around the world



SUBSCRIPTION CENTER



**GET UP TO
4 WEEKS FREE**
WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW

- [Start Home Delivery](#)
- [Renew Subscription](#)
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Earn Extra Income - Become an Independent Carrier](#)

NEWSPAPER ADS



FEATURING:
[Dining Delights](#)

More Savings:



- [Online Shopping Mall](#)
- [Print Grocery Coupons](#)
- [Win Movie Tickets](#)
- [Browse the Classifieds](#)

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Business](#)

[Features](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Tech](#)

[Marketplace](#)

Copyright © 2005 Detroit Free Press Inc. All rights reserved.