



VRLTA HURRICANE EMERGENCY GUIDE

SEPT 2018

The approaching Hurricane Florence has prompted thousands of people in Virginia to prepare for its landfall in the coming days. This storm could cause significant damage and flooding in coastal areas, as well as immense damage inland. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam has officially declared a state of emergency.

VRLTA has prepared this alert to all of our members statewide since evacuees from impacted areas will be traveling to and within Virginia. The below information and best practices will help hoteliers and restaurateurs across the state prepare for the coming days and issues that typically arise during a declared emergency.

HURRICANE TOOLKIT AND BEST PRACTICES

Work with Emergency Responders and Local Officials:

In times of emergency, VRLTA stands ready to support the Virginia hospitality community, the governor's office, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and other emergency staff to alert and assist impacted communities on evacuations and on finding temporary accommodations for displaced residents, as well as helping to feed first responders. The more the hospitality industry can do to accommodate these requests, the better served our community will be. If possible, offering a discounted room rate, or even complimentary services, to those impacted is most welcome.

Keep Employees Informed:

It is important to have all employees, vendors and client contact information on hand prior to the storm. VRLTA recommends using an alert notification system, or other means of communication identified prior to the storm, to keep all interested parties posted on status updates and next steps. Following the storm, notify all critical people of next steps, based on damage.

Informing the Traveling Public:

If your hotel is unable to accommodate travelers and needs to refer them to alternative lodging accommodations, VRLTA also encourages establishments to stay up to date on your social media accounts and use all forms of communication with the public to alert travelers and evacuees of available accommodations.

Treatment of Room Cancellations:

VRLTA asks its lodging members to consider waiving all cancellation fees in an emergency of this nature. Our industry's goal is to keep our visitors safe and out of harm's way.

Avoiding Room Cancellation Policies for Existing Reservations:

Please note that you may not retroactively toughen the cancellation policy for reservations you have already taken. In other words, if the terms for reservations you have already accepted for the coming days allow the guests to cancel without penalty, you must honor the original terms of those reservations.

Adopting Tougher Room Cancellation Policies for New Reservations:

If you determine that new reservations taken from this point forward will be nonrefundable, you must make sure this term is communicated in writing and orally to the guest at the time the reservation is taken. Additionally, if an evacuation order is issued, a governmental entity advises against traveling to your area, or for some other reason beyond the traveler's control it becomes impossible for the guest to come to the property, your cancellation policy may be negated. For public relations purposes, we suggest that you consider not treating reservations as non-refundable during a declared emergency. During an emergency, such policies often draw a considerable amount of unfavorable attention from local news media, and local officials. The negative publicity and potential legal implications are often greater than the immediate lost revenues.

Pet Policy:

VRLTA encourages hotels to consider relaxing restrictions on pets at your lodging property to better accommodate displaced evacuees.

Lost Utilities and Habitability:

If storm conditions leave your property without utility service or other basic services, it is possible that your guests would be able to consider the property uninhabitable, and would therefore not be obligated to honor their room reservation. Similarly, the hotel would not be obligated to the guest for such utility breakdowns that are beyond the hotel's control. In a number of cases, emergency workers have been willing and interested in renting hotel rooms without functioning utilities as part of their emergency response program. Often, these workers can secure temporary or expedited utility service to the involved properties.

USDA Food Safety Tips:

[Click here](#) for a list of recommendations to reduce food waste and the risk of foodborne illness during severe weather events. In the wake of a hurricane, there may likely be power outages and flooding. Both pose a risk to the integrity of food and water. Food safety requirements should be adhered to post-disaster if you are serving food to the public and to your own family. Be certain refrigerated food has been stored at correct temperatures of 41°F or below. Frozen food should be maintained at 0°F or below. Thawing should be conducted using only proper methods. Food packaging should be intact with no trace of water intrusion or exposure. If food has been exposed to storm related water or debris of any type, it should be discarded and should not be served. If food is in question, remember, when in doubt, throw it out. For information about food safety requirements, visit the USDA website or call 1-877-FOOD-644.