

## Hurricane Irma Response

September 4<sup>th</sup> thru 18<sup>th</sup> 2017

I began making phone calls to the island realtors, property managers, and rental agencies on Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> of a possible direct hit by the storm and the unpredictability, using Hurricane Charley as an example. I continued to make update calls the next day. I spoke with the manager of Pineland Marina and he informed me that he would be closing the marina with the 5:30 Island Girl Boat on Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> being the last run. I used this in my door to door notifications as the deadline to evacuate. I made them aware that the fire department would be closing if an evacuation order was made and that no services would be provided until it was safe to return. I also informed those who chose to stay that they must complete a refusal to leave form. I met with Commissioner McDonald, Bryan Brillhart and Duncan Rosen at 10:00am Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> and we discussed the evacuation plans and if any renters were on island. I learned of the possibility of NCIC and Boats and Fun having later runs off the island on Thursday at the meeting and passed this on to those who chose to stay if they changed their minds.

The islands and the surrounding area are Flood Zone A and a mandatory evacuation was made. I tried to be ahead of the order as Island Girl and Pineland Marina were being shut down. I still had to get our M191 boat to safety and made plans to store it at PIFD. I planned to ride the storm out in Cape Coral but I evacuated with the PIFD to a hotel in Ft Myers when Zone B was mandatory to leave. I was at the PIFD (the island division HQ) first thing after the storm passed. Pine Island was closed off at the Matlacha Bridge Monday and no one without a pass could get on island. I had no manpower. The road was blocked to the marina and I had to wait until access was cleared until I could put the boat in the water, which I did. I tried to get some help but all I could get was the Useppa fire chief. Again as it was blowing 30 + mph winds, I made the decision to wait until the next morning, then I had only 2 of the 4 guys scheduled and we opened the station and immediately began clearing roads.

My concern with getting everyone off the island may have trumped the propane, which will follow me forever, even though it only inconvenienced my staff and had nothing to do with FD operations or the island in general. I did fuel all the vehicles and the gas cans were full before the event. I had my guys supply ice, water and food for each shift (which they did with their own money) and made it available to whoever wanted it when we returned. My guys went out every day and did what they could to help clear roads and to speak with everyone they saw to make sure they were OK or if they needed anything.

I performed the duties outlined in the Emergency Response Guide. There were many other departments in the county that shut down and evacuated their stations. After the storm many of our firefighters were without power and had sustained damage to their homes but made their shifts.

We were lucky this time and should not become complacent in the future. In the future as every disaster is a learning opportunity I will strive to make improvements responding to them. I believe we are moving in that direction as the department is evolving.

Submitted by,

Chief Kinniry

Note:

There was a mandatory evacuation order signed on 7<sup>th</sup> September for Zone A which included the barrier islands, for 0900 the 8<sup>th</sup>. It was repealed on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

During the evacuation process the county did use the reverse 911 process to try and reach as many residents as possible, the island was included in that process.

There were over 300,000 people evacuated in Lee County, largest in county history. There were over 35,000 people in 14 shelters. Still 144 people homeless. With \$826 million in damage and 89 homes destroyed and zero fatalities.

Also to be clear the station was in full operation even without the back-up generator not having fuel. I had portable generators set up so that our refrigerator and radios were working. There was full staffing on all be 2 days after returning, the 1<sup>st</sup> day and the 16<sup>th</sup> was one short. I remained at the station until power was restored.