

Boating Tips on Hurricane Preparation

Douglas Gregory

UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension

Two years of hurricanes have given boaters and marina operators a lot of opportunity to evaluate which protection methods for boats and facilities worked the best. Documentation by insurance companies and consumer organizations such as Boat U.S. (Boat Owners Association of the United States), now makes this new information available to all boaters.

The boater's best protection from damage to their boats is to get them out of the water. Boats and yachts that were stored ashore on blocks and tied down survived the storms virtually unscathed. But almost 100% of those boats left in the water at docks suffered major damage or sunk. In addition, boats on dockside lifts suffered a lot of damage from being blown off cradles, bunk boards breaking, grinding against the lift or piling, etc. Hurricane force winds and the tidal surge seemed to be the major factors damaging boats on lifts. Docks and their boats were similarly pummeled by the wind, waves and tidal surge.

Surprisingly, concrete pilings proved to be more susceptible to breaking in two than the more flexible wooden pilings.

Boats at floating docks fared better than ones at fixed docks, but only up to the height of the pilings they were attached to. In areas of high tidal surge the floating docks floated right over their pilings and sailed away with the attached boats in tow. Now many marinas with floating docks that had 6-8 foot high pilings are replacing them with 18 foot pilings.

What about boats at anchor? Anchoring out, particularly in a known hurricane hole can be safer than staying tied to a dock. An anchored boat needs multiple extra-large anchors with the outmost anchors about 90 degrees from one another. An anchor typically used for regular overnight and short term anchorages is not sufficient for hurricane protection. One interesting aspect of anchoring is the type of anchor line used and how it is attached to the anchor and boat. An anchor with an all-chain anchor rode does not stretch and is not recommended for hurricane anchorage. The best anchor rode has proven to be an extra large nylon line attached to a generous length of chain at the anchor end and to a polyester line that extends from the cleat through the chock to just over the side of the boat. The nylon line stretches and provides stability in high waves while the polyester stretches less in the chock and provides greater resistance to abrasion and chafing than the nylon line.

This information is only a partial description of the findings and recommendations that can be found in the Boat U.S. publication "Hurricane Warning: A Guide to Preparing Boats and Marinas for Hurricanes". They also publish a quarterly "Seaworthy" magazine that comes free with their boat insurance, but costs \$10 a year otherwise. I have found it to be a great source of information on boating safety. Our office carries back issues for your reference. You can also see a web version of the hurricane brochure and check out samples of the "Seaworthy" magazine at www.boatus.com/.