

RETURNING HOME

After a hurricane has passed, the most immediate concern is, “when can I return home”. Property Owners may return after the EOC has authorized a general return. There is a process that must take place before an approval to return is given.

One of the first activities that will take place is an assessment of the impacted area. This requires individuals to inspect the devastated area and report the amount of damage to the EOC. This information will provide an overall picture of the total damage that the community received.

Roads must be cleared of debris before property owners can travel to their residence or business. An established order of highway clearing is placed in effect. The first road clearings will be to hospitals, fire stations and other public facilities. Next will be the main roads and finally neighborhood roads. Harbor Island has a plan to assist with the clearing of roads within the community. Crews will enter the island and move or push debris from the road onto the shoulder. Harbor Island employees will also help to clear its roads of debris. Roads that are not cleared may be closed for your protection.

Electrical service may not be restored for a considerable length of time depending on the severity of damage. Additional crews from other locations may be required to help restore service. The water supply may be contaminated and the system must be returned to its proper working condition before it is placed back in service. Bridges or causeways may be out of service or destroyed. Restaurants, grocery stores, hardware stores, gas stations and many other business locations may be closed for an extended period of time. You may want to return to conduct an assessment of your property and then return to a safe location.

If you decide to return and services are out, make sure that you have enough supplies to be self-sufficient. You will need enough supplies for an extended period of time. Before attempting to return home gather as much information as possible through the Emergency Information Sources provided. Base your decision to return on the best information available and your ability to be fully prepared.

Before returning home fill your vehicle(s) with fuel. You may need to bring extra fuel with you. Fuel should only be transported in appropriate containers and as safely as possible. Include a tire repair kit and compressor in your supplies. Flat tires are common after a hurricane has passed.

Wait until the area is declared safe before entering. This does not mean that your home is safe. Do not drive in flooded areas. When you arrive home inspect the outside area before entering. Watch for animals that may be using your home or any part of it for shelter and protection. Animals may become disoriented, be in shock and may attack if disturbed. This includes snakes, alligators, deer and

domestic animals that were left behind. Do not approach any animals that you discover.

Check electrical, gas and water lines for damage or leaks. Once inside avoid using candles and other open flames indoors. Pockets of gas may be inside and an open flame may ignite the fuel. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. If the telephone service is working use it to report emergency or life threatening situations only.

Structures and soil maybe weakened as a result of flooding and/or wind. This could result in a collapse without warning. Remember, medical and rescue help may not be immediately available.

Understanding that the desire to return home as soon as possible is strong, waiting a little longer may be the right decision. Before Property Owners return, specifically designated employees will return and conduct a visual assessment of the Island. This will include the condition of roads and bridges. This information will be provided to the General Manager as soon as possible.

It is important to remember that the decision to return must be based on the best available information. Do not return expecting to see the area in the same condition as when you left.