

## **WHAT IS A HURRICANE**

**A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone, the general term for all circulating weather systems over the tropical waters (counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere). Tropical cyclones are classified as follows:**

### **Tropical Depression:**

**An organized system of clouds and thunderstorms with a defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 38 mph or less.**

### **Tropical Storm:**

**An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39 to 73 mph.**

### **Hurricane:**

**An intense tropical weather system with a well defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or higher. Hurricanes are products of a tropical ocean and atmosphere. Powered by heat from the sea, they are steered by the easterly trade winds and the temperate westerlies as well as by their own ferocious energy. Around their core, winds grow with great velocity, generating violent seas. Moving ashore, they sweep the ocean inward while spawning tornadoes and producing torrential rains and floods. Each year, on average, 10 tropical storms, of which six become hurricanes, developing over the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico. Many of these remain over the ocean; however, hurricanes strike the United States coastline almost every year.**

**In general, the strongest winds are found on the right side of the hurricane. It should be remembered that the right side of the storm depends on the motion or direction of the storm. If a hurricane is moving to the west, the right side would be on the north side of the storm; if the storm is moving to the north, the right side would be on the east.**