

Disaster Preparedness and Response

Disaster preparedness and response information for owners of Older and Historic Properties

In recent years tropical storms, flooding, landslides, and other natural disasters have inflicted enormous suffering and property damage across Vermont. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO or Division for Historic Preservation) offers the following information sheets to assist property owners of older and historic properties in preparing and recovering from a natural disaster.

Preparedness and Planning

[The Importance of Planning for Disaster and Recovery: Lessons Learned from Irene](#) provides some guidance based on experience. This is a paper by Reid Thomas, Restoration Specialist with the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, presented to the Connecting to Collections Workshop, Hatteras, North Carolina, February 6, 2012.

With little time to prepare for a threatening storm, we recommend that you review the checklist below and consider taking immediate action to protect your property.

I. Exterior

Doors & Windows:

Secure all doors and windows. Windows and doors are extremely vulnerable to flying projectiles. Shutters and plywood provide additional protection. If a window is broken out, water can spray across the room damaging collections.

Loose Objects:

Trash cans, signs, lawn furniture, water hoses, children's and pets' toys, and other loose objects can become dangerous projectiles during a storm. It is essential to move loose objects to a secure location.

Gutters, downspouts, and drains:

If there is time, clear gutters and downspouts of leaves and debris. If downspouts empty around the foundation of the building, consider adding temporary extension pipes to carry water away from the building. Be sure to secure the extension pipes.

II. Interior

Move objects away from windows, doors, and fireplaces.

The areas in a building most likely to fail during a severe storm are windows, doors, roofs, and chimneys. Be sure to remove hanging decor from above fireplaces.

Protect fragile objects from potential moisture or wind damage.

Consider moving items such as glassware, prints, pottery, etc. into safe containers, chests, or boxes to protect from storm damage.

Shut off gas to building.

If you are evacuating, gas should be cut off at tank; Natural Gas should be shut off at exterior valve. Gas lines can be damaged during a storm. Better to play it safe.

Shut off partial/full power.

If a building will not be occupied during a storm, consider turning the main power breaker off. If the building has a security & fire system or sump pump, consider leaving the breaker on for the system. Breakers should be shut off for exterior outlets and any other outlets that are vulnerable to moisture. Forceful winds can blow moisture into exterior frame wall cavities.

III. Supply List

Have the following items on hand for emergency repairs and to protect objects from moisture:

- ✓ Buckets: Several large and small ones to collect water
- ✓ Towels, Blankets, Rags, Mop: For water clean-up
- ✓ Roll of Plastic: May need to cover objects or windows following the storm.
- ✓ Tarps and ropes: Necessary for emergency roof repairs. Roll roofing and sheet tin are also temporarily helpful.
- ✓ Plywood and lumber: Essential for temporary window, door, and roof patches
- ✓ Camera or video camera to document property. It helps to document the building and contents before and after the event. Do not leave camera to document the event.

If a natural disaster damages your older or historic building, the Division for Historic Preservation may be able to provide guidance and technical assistance as you begin the rebuilding and insurance process.

IS YOUR PROPERTY HISTORIC?

A property is considered historic if it is listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Places, or a local inventory of historic places. The National Register is the nation's official list of buildings, sites, objects, and districts that warrant special preservation consideration. Approximately 13,000 historic properties in Vermont are listed in the National Register either individually or as contributing properties within our 266+ historic districts. In addition to National Register listed and eligible properties, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP) maintains the Vermont State Register of Historic Places, which has a roster of more than 32,000 designated historic sites. Inclusion in the State Register is not a guarantee of National Register eligibility because properties may have been altered or deteriorated since they were recorded, but it is probable that the vast majority may be eligible.

Please check the [Online Resource Center](#) for documentation related to the listing of your property in the State or National Registers. VDHP's [State Architectural Historian](#) can assist with verifying the listing and assist if a property appears to be eligible for listing. For properties that are not already listed, an evaluation of State or National Register eligibility can be processed for insurance claims and when applying for other forms of assistance. For the purposes of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), this evaluation will be completed by the National Park Service's Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, in coordination with the State Architectural Historian. Although the [Online Resource Center](#) has documentation, it is likely that additional information such as historical background and photographs of the property before and after the disaster-caused damage will be needed when you request a determination of State or National Registers eligibility. In certain cases, it may be necessary for staff to visit the property to determine its eligibility.

Please use [this form](#) to request formal documentation of the historic status of your property.

WHAT ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES?

VDHP can provide technical restoration services to owners of older and historic properties and cemeteries affected by a natural disaster. Staff will consult, free of charge, with local governments, nonprofit organizations, churches, and citizens about damage and recommend repairs to historic properties. Services include telephone consultations, copies of technical articles and sample specifications, on-site inspections and evaluations, and referrals to specialty architects, contractors, and other restoration or rehabilitation experts. Photographs of storm related damage can greatly facilitate telephone consultations about your historic property's needs.

Information is also available on methods and materials to repair storm related damage, to best preserve the historic integrity of your property, and rehabilitate with the next disaster in mind. A property does not have to be listed in the State or National Registers for you to request a consultation, but due to staff limitations, priority will be given to listed and eligible properties.

The federal tax codes provide a 20% tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of income-producing historic buildings, including multi-family housing, that meet the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#). Properties must be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. State income tax credits are available to business and property owners with buildings constructed prior to 1983 and located within a state-designated downtown or village center. Credits can help defray the cost of historic rehabilitation, façade and code improvements and technology upgrades.

Although there are no special federal or state grants available to owners of historic properties affected by natural disasters, historic properties may be entitled to additional consideration from private insurers and state and federal relief agencies. Be sure to indicate on all claims or requests for assistance that your property is or may be historic.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED BURIED REMAINS OR RESOURCES AFFECTED BY A NATURAL DISASTER?

Damaged historic properties may contain or may be significant for archaeological resources. Once-buried features such as old wells, privies, cellar holes, foundations, and artifacts that are important to the history or understanding of an older property may have been exposed by uprooted trees, flood erosion, post-disaster cleanup efforts, and other ground disturbances caused by a natural disaster. Historic watercraft may have been dislodged or damaged by wave action or erosion. In addition to damaging headstones and boundary markers in historic cemeteries, a storm also may have uncovered human burials. Redefining cemetery boundaries once markers or trees are gone is often difficult. The [State Archaeologist](#) can assist with the identification of significant historic, prehistoric, or maritime resources. Our archaeologists will make efforts to visit damaged properties and may accompany other VDHP staff on inspections of damaged buildings or cemetery sites.

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

<https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation>

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