Sheriff's Home Defies Katrina

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Saint Bernard Parish, Louisiana

Shell Beach, LA – Sheriff Jack Stephens had to use an airboat to return to his home after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of Louisiana in August 2005. His neighborhood in Shell Beach was under water for weeks, and the cars, boats, and houses of his neighbors had been destroyed by the storm. As Sheriff Stephens approached his own property, he was relieved and grateful to see his elevated house still standing strong atop its pilings. The extra time and money he had invested in hurricane-resistant construction had paid off.

Sheriff Stephens is a native of St. Bernard Parish and is deeply attached to his coastal community. “I’ve always had the area in my system,” Stephens explained. “My family’s from here….so I built my dream house here….I love being on the water [in St. Bernard Parish]. It’s the best place I’ve ever lived.”

Residents between Lake Borgne and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet are aware of the potentially disastrous weather they face during the Atlantic hurricane season from June 1 through November 30 each year. The sheriff built his home to withstand the flooding and high winds of the fiercest hurricane he could imagine.

Hurricane Katrina hit Shell Beach with 20-foot waves and sustained winds of 145 miles per hour. “It was absolutely roaring here,” the sheriff said. On the evening of August 28, 2005, as Katrina approached, Sheriff Stephens secured his home as well as he could. He then left for his office in Chalmette, Louisiana, where he was on duty for the remainder of the storm.

Considering the vast destruction brought to his subdivision, the sheriff’s home fared exceptionally well. Despite the high winds, the house never budged from its anchored location atop heavy-duty pilings, and the roof remained attached to the frame. The house, elevated to 21 feet, stayed above the floodwaters. Storm shutters successfully defended all of the home’s windows.

However, there was some damage to Sheriff Stephens’ house. One or two panels of siding on the building’s exterior needed to be replaced, and wind-driven rain forced under the roof cap caused some damage to the drywall and flooring. The wooden stairways leading to the front and rear entrances were swept away by the harsh waves, and the on-grade storage shed located beneath the house was also washed away. “The damage was not insignificant, but on the whole the structure will be easily rehabilitated,” the sheriff said. “If I hadn’t taken extra measures to protect it, I don’t think the house would have lasted….I would spend the extra money [I invested in hurricane-resistant construction] again tomorrow—there’s no doubt that it was worth it.”

Sheriff Stephens wants to encourage people to do whatever they can to protect themselves from future storms. There are steps homeowners can take to minimize or avoid a hurricane’s destructive forces. “If you’re starting with a clean slab,” the sheriff advised, “it makes sense to elevate….Look at the high water level for Katrina, and go…higher than that…get it up in the air.”

Activity/Project Location	
Geographical Area:	**Single County in a State**
FEMA Region:	**Region VI**
State:	**Louisiana**
County:	**Saint Bernard Parish**
City/Community:	**Shell Beach**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector:	**Private**
Hazard Type:	**Hurricane/Tropical Storm**
Activity/Project Type:	**Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**
Activity/Project Start Date:	**08/2005**
Activity/Project End Date:	**Ongoing**
Funding Source:	**Homeowner**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost:	**Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster?	**No**
Value Tested By Disaster?	**Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #:	**No Federal Disaster specified**
Year First Tested:	**2005**
Repetitive Loss Property?	**No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1:	**http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/howto/index.shtm#4**
Reference URL 2:	**http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov/**

Main Points

- Considering the vast destruction brought to his subdivision, Sheriff Stephen's home fared exceptionally well during Hurricane Katrina.
- The house, elevated to 21 feet, stayed above the floodwaters. It is anchored atop heavy-duty pilings.
- Storm shutters successfully defended all of the home’s windows.

Sheriff Stephen's house.

Storm shutters.

Piling and bolts.

The Sheriff’s house stands strong after Hurricane Katrina.

Remains of a house destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Remains of a house destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.