

The approaching Hurricane Irma has prompted thousands of people in the Southeastern United States to prepare for its landfall in the coming days. This storm could cause significant damage and flooding in coastal areas, and beyond. North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper has officially declared a state of emergency saying, "Irma is a strong storm. Wherever you live, you need to take this seriously and start preparing for impacts."

NCRLA is sending this emergency alert to all of our members statewide since evacuees from impacted areas be traveling to and within North Carolina. The below information and best practices will help hoteliers and restaurateurs across North Carolina prepare for the coming days and issues that typically arise during a declared emergency.

Work with Emergency Responders and Local Officials

In times of emergency, NCRLA stands ready to support the North Carolina hospitality community, the governor's office, North Carolina Department of Emergency Management, Visit NC, convention and visitors bureaus, and other emergency staff to alert and assist impacted communities on evacuations and on finding temporary accommodations for displaced residents, as well as helping to feed first responders.

The more the hospitality industry can do to accommodate these requests, the better served our community will be. If possible, offering a discounted room rate, or even complimentary services, to those impacted is most welcome.

Keep Employees Informed

It is important to have all employees, vendors and client contact information on hand prior to the storm. NCRLA recommends using an alert notification system, or other means of communication identified prior to the storm, to keep all interested parties posted on status updates and next steps. Following the storm, notify all critical people of next steps, based on damage.

Download the ReadyNC App

Created by the N.C. Department of Public Safety and North Carolina Emergency Management, the ReadyNC mobile app is an all-in-one tool to assist people in preparation for everything from traffic jams to hurricanes and ice storms. The app gives

information on real-time traffic and weather conditions, river levels, evacuations and power outages. It is free and available for both iPhone and Android phones. Learn more here: <https://readync.org/EN/DOWNLOADAPP.html>.

Alternative Lodging Referrals for the Traveling Public

If your hotel is unable to accommodate travelers and needs to refer them to alternative lodging accommodations, NCRLA is providing a link to a list of hotel brand toll-free phone numbers travelers may use to get immediate information about hotel room availability. [Follow this link for the list of hotel brand contact information list](#). In addition, the Visit NC Call Center has real-time travel and hotel information, and can be reached at 1-800-VISITNC (800-847-4862).

Treatment of Room Cancellations

NCRLA asks its lodging members to consider waiving all cancellation fees in an emergency of this nature. Our industry's goal is to keep our visitors safe and out of harm's way.

Avoiding Room Cancellation Policies for Existing Reservations

Please note that you may not retroactively toughen the cancellation policy for reservations you have already taken. In other words, if the terms for reservations you have already accepted for the coming days allow the guests to cancel without penalty, you must honor the original terms of those reservations.

Adopting Tougher Room Cancellation Policies for New Reservations

If you determine that new reservations taken from this point forward will be nonrefundable, you must make sure this term is communicated in writing and orally to the guest at the time the reservation is taken. Additionally, if an evacuation order is issued, a governmental entity advises against traveling to your area, or for some other reason beyond the traveler's control it becomes impossible for the guest to come to the property, your cancellation policy may be negated. For public relations purposes, we suggest that you consider not treating reservations as non-refundable during a declared emergency. During an emergency, such policies often draw a considerable amount of unfavorable attention from local news media, local officials and the North Carolina Attorney General's Office. The negative publicity and potential legal implications are

often greater than the immediate lost revenues.

Room Pricing During an Emergency

North Carolina's price gouging law is usually triggered when the state suffers or is threatened by a natural disaster such as a hurricane. Price gouging—or charging too much in times of crisis—is against North Carolina law when a disaster, an emergency or an abnormal market disruption for critical goods and services is declared or proclaimed by the governor.

[Under the law](#), the Attorney General's Office can put a stop to price gouging and seek refunds for consumers who paid too much. The courts may also impose civil penalties against price gougers of up to \$5,000 for each violation.

To file a price gouging complaint, [click here](#).

Pet Policy

NCRLA encourages hotels to consider relaxing restrictions on pets at your lodging property to better accommodate displaced evacuees.

Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA)

NCRLA encourages North Carolina hotels to participate in the [Transitional Shelter Assistance](#) (TSA) program. This initiative is intended to provide short-term lodging for eligible disaster survivors whose communities are either uninhabitable or inaccessible due to disaster-related damage. FEMA will contact those people eligible for the program. A listing of available properties under this program can be found [here](#).

For more details or to sign up, visit the Corporate Lodging Consultants (CLC) website [here](#).

Lost Utilities and Habitability

If storm conditions leave your property without utility service or other basic services, it is possible that your guests would be able to consider the property uninhabitable, and would therefore not be obligated to honor their room reservation. Similarly, the hotel

would not be obligated to the guest for such utility breakdowns that are beyond the hotel's control. In a number of cases, emergency workers have been willing and interested in renting hotel rooms without functioning utilities as part of their emergency response program. Often, these workers can secure temporary or expedited utility service to the involved properties.

USDA Food Safety Tips

[Click here](#) for a list of recommendations to reduce food waste and the risk of foodborne illness during severe weather events. In the wake of a hurricane, there may likely be power outages and flooding. Both pose a risk to the integrity of food and water. Food safety requirements should be adhered to post-disaster if you are serving food to the public and to your own family. Be certain refrigerated food has been stored at correct temperatures of 41°F or below. Frozen food should be maintained at 0°F or below. Thawing should be conducted using only proper methods. Food packaging should be intact with no trace of water intrusion or exposure. If food has been exposed to storm-related water or debris of any type, it should be discarded and should not be served. If food is in question, remember, when in doubt, throw it out.

For information about food safety requirements, visit the [USDA website](#) or call 1-877-FOOD-644.

Weight and Driver Restrictions

Gov. Cooper has waived truck weight, size and hours of service restrictions so that vehicles carrying essential supplies such as food, medicine, fuel, or transporting livestock or crops can get their jobs done quickly.

NCRLA Resources

NCRLA's legal and operations staff is ready to respond to any issues that naturally arise such as pricing limitations and room cancellation issues due to pending weather. Please contact key team members using the below information:

- Lynn Minges, President & CEO: 919-844-3007 or lminges@ncrla.org
- Alyssa Barkley, COO/Health & Safety Regulations: 919-844-7883 or abarkley@ncrla.org
- Kim Siomkos, Government Affairs/Legal: 919-861-0942 or ksiomkos@ncrla.org
- Miranda Kinney, Director of Communications: 919-747-2205 or mkinney@ncrla.org

Additional Resources

- [FEMA Business Protection Toolkit](#)
- [FEMA Plan and Prepare webpage](#)
- For public disaster information/assistance: Call 211 or 888-892-1161
- Road condition updates: Call 211 or visit ReadyNC.org
- Health and safety protocols:
 - [Protect food/water during a storm](#)
 - [Emergency food safety guidelines](#)
 - [Health and food safety for restaurants reopening after hurricanes and flooding](#)
- Follow NC Emergency Management on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) for updates.

NCRLA will continue to keep you apprised of developments and resources as they develop.