Hurricane Season is Far from Over

Watching the media coverage as Hurricane Gustav approached and hit the Louisiana coast this week, I was reminded that September 11 will be the sixteenth anniversary of Hurricane Iniki in Hawaii, and December 8 will be the sixth anniversary of Typhoon Pongsona in Guam. Both of these storms did significant damage to properties operated by our company. Accordingly, for the next three months, as we pass through the peak of the hurricane/typhoon season in the northern hemisphere, everyone at all of our properties across the Pacific should be prepared to deal with a major storm.

Iniki, classified as a Category 4 storm on the Saffir-Simpson scale, had sustained winds of 145 mph, with gusts up to 175 mph, as it approached the island of Kauai. It caused six deaths and $1.6 billion (in 1992 dollars, equivalent to $2.3 billion today) in damage, making it one of the most destructive storms in U.S. history and most certainly the most damaging hurricane to hit Hawaii in modern times. Properties operated by Outrigger on both Oahu and Kauai were among the hotels sustaining significant damage.

Typhoon Pongsona swept across Guam, where our company operates three properties. A Category 4 storm, with sustained winds of 144 mph and peak gusts of 173 mph, it devastated the island. Utility services were shut down for many days. Over 3,000 homes were either destroyed or significantly damaged. Fortunately, there were no deaths directly attributed to Pongsona.

I was born in Hawaii, and during my first 50 years, we had some bad storms, but none did significant damage. When Hurricane Iwa hit the state in 1982, most residents, including yours truly, were completely surprised.

As Iwa approached, I was giving a deposition in a lawyer’s office in downtown Honolulu. The winds were gusting, and the windows started to rattle loudly. The young court reporter’s eyes widened further and further, as she punched away on her stenograph machine. Based on my lifelong experience, I told her not to worry about the weather. Boy, was I wrong! The winds intensified quickly, and we soon had to end the session.

As I write this article, three storms, Hanna, Ike, and Josephine, are forming in the Atlantic and heading toward Florida. Fortunately, no hurricanes or typhoons are currently spinning toward any part of the Pacific, where Outrigger and OHANA operate. That, however, could change quickly.

While we hope and pray for the best, let’s review everything we do at work and at home to get ready for the worst. The National Hurricane Center Web site (www.nhc.noaa.gov/HAW2/english/intro.shtml) has some great information. The Hawaii State Civil Defense Web site (www.scd.state.hi.us/) is also an excellent resource. Hotel Interactive has an article specifically focusing on hotel planning for a weather crisis (www.hotelinteractive.com/article.aspx?articleid=11410).

Let’s Be Prepared!