

A Third Hurricane

Life Care's centers in Florida are battering down the hatches for yet another hurricane -- the third in a four-week period. Our residents, staff, families and residents of the state are surely wondering, "When will it end?" Weary from loss of rest and physical exhaustion, and drained emotionally, they all prepare for Hurricane Ivan.

Late Thursday evening, tourists and residents throughout the Florida Keys were sent packing to avoid the wrath of Ivan, even as millions of disaster-stricken residents struggled to pick up the pieces from Charley and Frances. Forecasters said Ivan could reach the island chain as early as Sunday. The last time three hurricanes hit Florida in a single season was 1964.

Ivan reached 160 mile-per-hour winds at one point Thursday, and it has already killed at least 23 people as it tore through the Caribbean on its steady march toward the Florida coast. As of this writing, the storm was headed straight toward Jamaica, where officials urged a half-million people to evacuate.

While forecasters view the Keys as Ivan's prime target, the storm could shift to anywhere in Florida and possibly all the way up to South Carolina. Although he said he was not working with a "doomsday scenario," Florida Gov. Jeb Bush said officials and residents have no choice but to prepare for a third hurricane. "People are at wit's end that have been impacted by this, and the people we are asking to respond have some challenges of their own," he said.

Charley struck southwest Florida, where our center in Punta Gorda was right in the eye of the storm, on Friday, August 13, with winds of 145 mph, causing an estimated \$6.8 billion in damage and 27 deaths. Frances hit the state's eastern coast, where Life Care has a long line of centers, early Sunday with 105 mph winds, leaving \$2 billion to \$4 billion in insured damage and at least 16 dead in the state.

Ivan is the most powerful hurricane to hit the Caribbean in a decade. Ninety percent of the homes in Grenada were damaged, looting erupted and a prison was destroyed, leaving criminals on the loose.

Pray for the winds to subside and that our residents, staff and their families, along with all the people who could be impacted by this storm, can remain safe from harm.

--Beecher Hunter