**Q. How do I prepare my business and employees for hurricane season in light of COVID-19, to prevent one disaster from becoming two?**

A.​  Meteorologists have raised a red flag to warn coastal regions of an abnormally active hurricane season in 2020.  Broward County, Florida Mayor Dale Holness described this as a potential “double disaster” if a hurricane were to strike amid a COVID-19 outbreak. Those with active constructions sites should think of the following as they prepare for the June 1, 2020 beginning of hurricane season.

 First, it is never too early to make a plan. There is a great benefit to having a hurricane preparedness and safety plan that can be shared with the entire team. Some key things to incorporate into a plan include: a timeline and steps to take to secure a project site, a process for identifying potential safety hazards (such as cranes or other equipment), and the designation of a team of key personnel who can make storm-time decisions quickly. Another useful feature would be a high stormwater removal plan, to ensure that the discharge of runoff from a site will be in an appropriate and safe manner that is in compliance with any applicable erosion control plan.

 Second, it is crucial to document work progress and create inventories. This documentation is key to adequately evaluate a site for damage post-storm, and it can be useful in the event there is a need to submit an insurance claim for any damage. Relatedly, make sure that there is valid and up to date insurance.

Third, a contractor should remember to check on distinctions that may emerge between states if he plans on chasing the storm for work afterwards. For instance, sometimes work that does not require a license in one state, requires a license in another state. A general rule of thumb is to check the licensing requirements in all neighboring states as they may vary, and working without a license can bring on a slew of major issues. For instance, Georgia law provides that a residential or general contractor must be licensed by the state of Georgia. Any contractor who fails to comply with this licensing requirement is subject to fines and penalties and is prohibited from seeking to enforce a lien against any property on which he has worked. Notably, lien laws and construction payment document regulations may also vary across states. It is vital to understand payment laws and lien waiver rules in any state where the contractor may perform recovery work.

Additionally, in the aftermath of a disaster, contractors may be spread thin and find themselves working on more jobs than they can handle with crews that may not be their regulars. Doing extra research ahead of time can help contractors identify who they should and should not work with. This may save contractors from issues down the road like a homeowner suing them because of a subcontractor’s defective workmanship or negligence.

Finally, contractors may consider working to help homeowners stormproof their homes in advance of any storm bearing down. Due to COVID-19, individuals may be safer staying in their homes during a storm than evacuating and increasing the risk of exposure to the virus. Doing work in advance may help strengthen homes before hurricanes so that riding out a storm is more feasible. The contractor would need to make sure appropriate documentation is executed so that it is clear the contractor is not guaranteeing the safety and security of his work through hurricane season or through any particular storm.

If you have specific questions please do not hesitate to contact me.