

Hurricane Preparedness for Organs?

After Hurricane Katrina, I was asked by a church organ committee, whose church had been flooded, what they could do to prepare in the event of future hurricanes. Honestly, until that point in time, I had not given this much thought, and in hindsight that particular church could have done little to limit damage to their organ with more than three feet of water in the church for almost a week.

But there are some things that can be done to at least limit the possibility of damage to your organ, assuming you will not have deep floodwater over an extended period of time. Many church organs are damaged through roofs and windows leaking from wind damage. Here is a list of things to do which may prevent complete destruction of your organ.

1) Higher ground!

If your console is moveable, move it to the highest level in the sanctuary (often the chancel or choir areas). If this is not possible, then placing a simply built 6" X 72" X 72" plywood box under the organ and pedal board can often prevent damage from water accumulation during roof damage and/or damaged windows. This platform can be built a head of time for easy storage, or even using several cinder blocks with boards across the top can serve the same purpose. Sometimes it is possible to pad the top-backs of pews and lay the console on it's back across them.

2) Keep away from windows!

If at all possible, move the console away from windows. Often organ consoles and pianos could have been saved if they had only not been near a window that was blown out allowing rain in. If the speaker cables will not allow this much movement, then disconnect the cables. Use some sort of labeling on cables as they are removed, to make reconnections later a bit easier.

3) Pad it and Wrap it!

Once the organ is on higher ground and is away from windows, wrap it very completely with moving blankets or some other heavy padding to protect the console from bumps and bruises from falling and flying objects... the more the better. Secure with packing tape. Then completely wrap the console with two layers of heavy tarps. Wrap and tape each tarp layer separately and making sure it is secured very tightly with packing tape or duct tape. Leave no loose ends for wind to catch. In your hurricane supplies, plan for this padding and tarp, and keep them at hand.

4) Don't forget the speakers!

Although not as expensive to replace as the console, a little work can save many dollars. Speakers can be covered with tarps and/or plastic sheeting. How to do this will depend on how and where your speakers are installed.

5) Facades?

If you have an organ facade with display pipes, how you deal with these will be according to the size of the facade and the ability you have in the church to protect them. Wrapping a large facade with pipes can be a very big job, and with all of the other preparations before a hurricane (both in the church and personally), there just may not be time for this. At the least, we would recommend having on hand tarp large enough to completely cover your facade, securing this with duct tape.

We hope you never experience a loss due to hurricane damage, but a little preparation may help.



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