



How Home Builders Can Help Their Communities Rebuild After a Disaster

Your Local Connections Can Assist Those in Need

Harvey. Irma. Florence. Michael. Destructive storms have recently wreaked havoc on many communities throughout the country and families are left picking up the pieces of their homes—and lives. Because of the widespread destruction, there's often far more demand for repair work than local remodelers can handle for the foreseeable future.

Here are some ways home builders can step in and help:

1. **Call your current and former employees, trades and subcontractors.** First, make sure they and their families are safe. Then, find out if they are able to work. Some may be out of commission with flooded homes themselves.
2. **Create a list of available workers.** You'll need a list to source workers from once you begin repairing homes. You'll especially need demo crews, paint and drywall specialists, and carpenters.
3. **Contact your current and former clients.** The families you've built new homes for in the past may have suffered damage in the storm. You already have a relationship with them, which makes it easy to reach out and see if they need help. Even if they don't, they'll appreciate that you care – that's just good customer service.
4. **Be a valuable information source.** Home owners need advice right now. They are calling their insurance companies, FEMA, and remediation companies, and most likely not getting through, so their anxiety level is high. Collect important phone numbers they may need, especially services that can help them cope in the first few weeks, and help them navigate the new territory of getting their homes back in order.
5. **Respond to urgent needs first.** Once it is safe to drive the roadways, your top priority is anyone who has a health and safety issue. For example, if some of the customer's roof has been torn off, posing a risk for water damage, attend to that first. To be well-prepared for hurricanes or high-wind storms, you should always have stockpiles of blue tarps in varying sizes and plenty of ropes.
6. **Help older clients next.** Also, anyone who has a physical or mental challenge. Finally, help existing and past clients.
7. **Don't take on work you're not trained to handle.** For example, your company is probably not set up for water remediation. Don't go out and get dehumidifiers, and try to dry the house out. If you're not fully successful, and the house later develops mold, you could be legally liable for making the situation

worse.

8. **Advise your clients to be realistic and patient.** This applies to both home owners that had storm damage and those that didn't. Suppliers may run out of materials such as drywall due to high demand. This can delay or stop progress on all your clients' jobs.
9. **Learn how to work with FEMA and insurance companies.** Your clients will most likely be completely in the dark about how to get the work paid for. In many cases, settlements from FEMA will not cover the cost of having their homes restored, and they will have to pay out of pocket to get it done.
10. **Look at "flood-plus" projects.** Some home owners will want to do more extensive structural remodels since their home is torn up anyway; these types of projects may provide more consistent work for your crew and more profit for you.
11. **Don't overcharge.** Word will spread quickly and it will hurt your company.
12. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Finally, once you start repairing homes, service these clients well. Give them hope, encouragement and ongoing communications about the schedule and progress of the job. This will likely be one of the more traumatic times of their lives, and your kindness and consideration will go a long way towards helping your community recover.

This article was adapted from a NAHBNow blog post written by Dan Bawden, CAPS CGP CGR GMB, following Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Bawden is president of Legal Eagle Contractors Co. in Houston and was the 2017 NAHB Remodelers Chair.