

# Survey finds most coastal Connecticut residents underestimate storm threat

March 27 2015, by Kevin Dennehy

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Most residents living along the Connecticut coast underestimate the physical and economic threats posed by major coastal storms, sometimes despite advanced notice and exceptionally accurate weather forecasts, according to a new report by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC).

In a survey of more than 1,100 [residents](#) living within two miles of the Connecticut shore, only 21% said they would leave their homes in the event of a Category 2 hurricane—a major storm in which wind speeds

exceed 96 miles per hour—if they did not receive any official notification. Just 6 in 10 (58%) said they would leave even if an official advised them to do so.

About one-third of residents believe it would be safer to stay at home than to evacuate in the event of such a strong hurricane. Seventy percent said they were unsure or unaware whether they were even located in an evacuation zone.

Researchers hope these insights into public knowledge, risk perceptions, experiences, and behaviors will help emergency planners and responders improve their communications with coastal communities during future weather emergencies.

Many of the respondents live in communities that were battered by Hurricane Irene in 2011, and Superstorm Sandy in 2012. During both events, many people stayed in their homes despite being warned of potentially dangerous weather conditions.

"Decades of communication research has demonstrated that effective messages require an in-depth understanding of the intended audience and a focus on the needs of that audience, rather than those of the communicator," said Jennifer Marlon, an associate research scientist with YPCCC and lead investigator of the project.

"Advancing storm preparedness and communication is vital for this region as the U.S. National Climate Assessment predicts that hurricanes will grow worse in the coming decades," Marlon said.

Other key findings include:

- Coastal Connecticut residents generally underestimate storm impacts: about half (52%) say damage from past storms was

more than they had expected, whereas 19% say past damage was less than they had expected.

- Only about one third (31%) say they have evacuated at least once to avoid a storm since the beginning of 2009. Three quarters of coastal residents (74%) have never seen a local evacuation map.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Sea Grant Coastal Storm Awareness Program funded the project, which aims to improve public awareness and understanding during hazardous coastal events.
- A second report is forthcoming that will identify five target audiences based on residents' attitudes and perceptions of severe [coastal storms](#). A webinar hosted by the YPCCC will also be held in April to present the research findings from both reports. Check the YPCCC website for details ([environment.yale.edu/climate-communication](http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication) ).

The Yale Project on Climate Change Communication conducts research on public responses to [climate change](#) and other risks, and develops communication strategies for government, business, civil society, and the media. It is based at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

Provided by Yale University

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