



DISASTER ASSISTANCE

When natural disasters strike, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) is ready to provide assistance to historic properties and resources that are impacted. This support comes in the form of surveying affected areas, administering the regulatory review process, managing grants, and providing materials to assist property owners and museums with impacted collections or buildings.

NATURAL DISASTERS IN TEXAS

Hurricane Harvey made landfall as a Category 4 storm near Rockport on August 25, 2017. Nearby wind gusts topped 100 miles per hour, leading to widespread destruction of homes and buildings. Pounding waves on top of Harvey's storm surge inundated parts of the Texas Coastal Bend, damaging some areas. Harvey's extremely slow movement kept a surge of moisture into southeast Texas for days, causing catastrophic flooding and one of the worst weather disasters in U.S. history. Harvey caused unprecedented damage to Texas' housing, business, infrastructure, health and social services, the environment, and historic properties. Hurricane Harvey impacted 1,726 documented historic sites in the state, and recovery efforts continue to this day.

Natural disasters in Texas have a long history. The Galveston Great Storm of 1900 led to the destruction of 2,600 homes and the loss of 6,000 to 8,000 lives. In 2008, Hurricane Ike caused \$84 billion in property losses, and the Memorial Day floods of 2015 severely damaged hundreds of homes in the Austin region. These events, as well as wildfires, droughts, tornadoes, and winter storms, have all impacted Texas communities. Climate change and shifting weather patterns will also continue to bring increased threats to historic and cultural resources in the coming decades.

WHAT WE DO

DISASTER PREPARATION

Preparing for future disasters should begin with understanding what resources and places are vulnerable.



Wood Mansion in Bayside (Refugio County) received a grant to address damage from Hurricane Harvey.

Stakeholders can create effective disaster resilience plans with conscientious collaboration between preservation partners and local governments. Such plans can help communities enhance their capacity to respond to disasters while protecting historic and cultural resources from loss.

The THC worked with stakeholders at the state, local, and federal levels to produce the *Texas Statewide Historic Preservation Plan 2022–2032*, which identifies disaster resilience planning as a key theme. Three companion documents help historic property owners and state and local planners manage disaster threats to historic properties. *The Texas Statewide Assessment of Disaster-Related Threats and Recommendations* provides a framework for assessing and managing disaster risks to historic properties that fall under planners' jurisdiction and contains an overview of state and federal assistance available after a disaster.

Also available is the *Best Practice Guide to Historic Property Owners Handbook* and *Best Practice Guide to Local Government Disaster Planning*. Both documents discuss how to identify disaster risk and prepare for it. The latter document focuses on the role local governments may play in assisting historic property owners in preparing for a disaster and in the recovery process.

The THC's Museum Services Program provides online training and resources on emergency preparedness and disaster response through webinars. Staff members also

provide museums and communities impacted by disasters with direct assistance, often connecting them with the Texas Collections Emergency Resource Alliance for on-the-ground support.

DISASTER RESPONSE AND MITIGATION

In addition to providing these resources, when possible, the THC sends staff into the field to assist in surveying and identifying historic resources that have been impacted by natural disasters. Staff can advise how to stabilize a damaged historic property, or how to document and salvage a historic property that must be demolished for public safety.

THC staff can also advise on recovery methods or repairs that will preserve the historic character of a damaged historic property. When historic properties are being repaired, we work with state and federal agencies to meet preservation regulatory requirements so disaster recovery and mitigation aid can be provided in a timely manner.

The THC also manages grants, when available, that assist with the rehabilitation or repair of qualifying historic properties. One example is the Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund Grant, which was established by Congress in 2018 and is administered by the National Park Service. In 2019, Texas received a \$12,518,047 grant for preservation projects to help historic properties and communities recover from the damage of Hurricane Harvey. The THC has administered 36 subgrants for projects ranging from surveys to rehabilitation, preservation planning, and educational efforts.

HOW TO REACH US

Several THC divisions and programs are involved in disaster assistance efforts. For questions or more information, please contact the THC's Division of Architecture at 512-463-6000 or architecture@thc.texas.gov.



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