

# Those on the registry at increased risk during natural disasters

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By [Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg](#) . . . For some people convicted of sex crimes in Florida, the only shelter open to them during Hurricane Dorian was the county jail.

In some counties, people on the registry were barred from shelters set up for those evacuating, and told to go to separate locations, away from children and other community members. If they attempted to stay with friends or relatives, they faced daunting residency and registration requirements, according to the Florida Action Committee, which advocates for reform of sex offender registry laws. Failure to comply can mean a felony conviction and incarceration.

In Osceola County, a separate shelter was set up at the housing agency for “sex offenders,” meaning people on the registry, according to a [local news report](#) by WKMG-TV. And in Flagler County, registered sex offenders were directed to go

to the sheriff's office for shelter, according to a [WJXT-TV](#) report. The Nassau County Board of Commissioners [website](#) advised people on the sex offender registry to seek shelter in the county jail.

"It was such a traumatic experience to be incarcerated. I'm not going to subject myself to that voluntarily," a representative with the Florida Action Committee told The Appeal. "I'd rather tie myself to a tree."

The representative asked to remain anonymous because he is on the state sex offender registry. He said he is not living in an area that needed to evacuate.

Such restrictions, critics say, fail to prevent sexual harm and only punish an already marginalized population: registrants and their families, who can be split apart in a storm.

"Natural disasters, emergencies are complicated for everybody," said Guy Hamilton-Smith, legal fellow at the Sex Offense Litigation and Policy Resource Center at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. "For people who are on the registry and who are required to comply with this additional layer of law and policy, they become even more exceptionally complicated with a potential prison term on the end of it if they don't manage to navigate the laws perfectly."

Under Florida law, those who evacuate must register their temporary addresses, in person, at the sheriff's office if they will be away from home for three or more days. They are also required to update their [driver's license or identification card](#) with the temporary address within 48 hours of their departure date.

**[Read the rest of the piece here at The Appeal.](#)**

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