

Two years after crane collapses, construction firms preparing for Hurricane Dorian 🗝️



The construction crane at Vice in downtown Miami snapped during Hurricane Irma.

MC GOMEZ



By **Brian Bandell** – Senior Reporter, South Florida Business Journal
an hour ago

Construction contractors across South Florida are bracing their job sites for Hurricane Dorian with the lessons of the 2017 hurricane season fresh in their minds.

Two years ago, Hurricane Irma caused three construction cranes in Miami-Dade and Broward counties to collapse. Some towers under construction in the Miami area had debris come loose and damage nearby structures.

Hurricane Irma landed in the Keys and Southwest Florida, and South Florida felt only its outer bands. However, Hurricane Dorian appears headed straight for the state's East Coast.

Sean Murphy, co-president of Miami-based Coastal Construction, has 25 sites across Florida being secured as the storm approaches. His staff is emptying trash, cleaning up loose materials, strapping down potential debris and securing their cranes. Depending on their design, some cranes can be lowered while others are left to spin like a weather vane in the storm.

“If you follow protocol, cranes should stay intact,” Murphy said.

Although many people have been put on edge by Hurricane Dorian slowing down, Murphy said that will provide contractors more time to secure their sites.

Brad Meltzer, president of Miami-based Plaza Construction, said his team started securing its sites Thursday. It has a crane on Miami Beach for the 1212 Lincoln Road project that it will leave up to spin in the storm. For some projects, the delay from the storm could be weeks, he added.

A crane fell at a Plaza Construction job in Miami during Hurricane Irma, causing damage to the project. Meltzer said his company did everything correctly in preparing the crane, but a factor beyond their control led to the collapse. Plaza Construction no longer uses that model of crane, he added.

“Any time you go through an experience, you hopefully learn from it,” Meltzer said. “Everybody can make their practices better.”

Marker Construction President **Peggy Marker** is helping her Fort Lauderdale-based company secure 15 sites in South Florida. How well a building under construction can withstand a hurricane depends on what stage it's in. The most challenging situations are when there's no roof or windows on a structure, there are large stacks of roof tiles, or landscaping has been delivered but not installed.

Post storm, one of Marker's biggest concerns is finding fuel for her subcontractors. They can't visit sites, or operate equipment, without fuel.

Since Hurricane Irma, many general contractors have included hurricane response duties for their subcontractors into their contracts, said **Josh Atlas**, a construction law attorney with Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr in West Palm Beach. The leadership teams and responsibilities should be identified at the outset of the project, so the workers are prepared when a hurricane approaches, he said.

Atlas recommends construction crews do a hurricane preparation walk-through, including securing for the cranes.

“There is a focus on cranes given the exposure from last time,” Atlas said. “There's a focus on making sure the same kind of thing doesn't happen again.”