

FLORIDA STORM PREPAREDNESS • 2026 EDITION

Hurricane-Proof Your Garage: Florida Complete Guide

What Sarasota and Manatee County homeowners need to know about hurricane-rated garage doors, Florida building code requirements, and what to do before a storm makes landfall.

BEFORE HURRICANE SEASON: YOUR GARAGE DOOR CHECKLIST

- ☐ Locate the FL# label inside your door and verify the wind speed rating
- ☐ Perform a balance test: disconnect, lift to mid-height, confirm it holds position
- ☐ Confirm your opener has battery backup or everyone knows the manual release cord
- ☐ Keep the door fully closed once a hurricane warning is issued. Do not crack it open
- ☐ Call a technician if your door is 10+ years old and hasn't been serviced recently

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Hurricane season in Florida doesn't sneak up on anyone. June arrives, the tropics start churning, and every homeowner in Sarasota and Manatee County runs through the same mental checklist: shutters, generator, water, food. Garage door tends to come last, though honestly it often doesn't make the list at all.

That's a problem, because garage doors are the largest opening in most homes and, in a major storm, often the first component to fail. When a garage door gives way during a hurricane, the pressurized air entering the structure drives catastrophic damage to the roof and walls from the inside out. Engineers call this progressive structural failure, though what homeowners actually experience is more immediate: a garage they can't use, a home open to the storm, and an insurance claim process that can take months.

This guide covers what Florida's building code actually requires, how to read the label on your own door, what your options are if your door isn't rated for your county's design wind speed, and what to do in the days and hours before a storm makes landfall.

Why a 16-Foot Garage Door Is Your Home's Biggest Wind Vulnerability

Most structural components in a Florida-code home, window glazing, wall assemblies, roof trusses, are individually rated and tested for specific wind loads. Garage doors work the same way, except that a standard two-car door spans roughly 16 feet wide and 7 feet tall, which is about 112 square feet of wind-catchable surface. A standard exterior entry door covers roughly 21 square feet, so that size difference matters enormously when wind speeds reach hurricane force and sustained pressure starts cycling against the structure.

Manufacturers test garage doors to specific pressure ratings, and a door built for an inland market might be certified for winds around 90 mph. Florida's coastal counties sit in a different pressure category entirely, which is why the state maintains its own product approval system for building materials sold and installed here. If your door wasn't tested and certified to meet your county's requirements, you're operating on hope rather than documentation, and that's a different situation once a storm is actually in the forecast.

What Florida's Building Code Actually Requires for Garage Doors in Sarasota and Manatee County

The Florida Building Code (FBC) 2023, 7th Edition, addresses wind loads for all buildings and structures under Section 1609. For residential properties in Sarasota and Manatee County, the code's wind speed maps establish a basic design wind speed of 150 mph for Risk Category II buildings, which covers most single-family homes, and that 150 mph figure is the benchmark every permitted opening in your home needs to be engineered and tested against.

Section 1609.1.2 specifically addresses the protection of openings, and garage doors fall squarely under this provision because their large surface area makes them primary wind load targets during a storm. In plain terms: any garage door installed in a permitted Florida home must be tested to withstand the design wind speed applicable to its county, and it must carry documentation proving it passed.

The Florida Product Approval System and What the FL# Label Means

Every building product legally sold and installed in Florida under a permit carries a Florida Product Approval number, formatted as "FL" followed by a multi-digit code. For garage doors, that number

confirms the product was tested and passed Florida's required wind load performance standards, with most FL#-labeled doors complying with ANSI/DASMA 108, the industry standard test method for structural performance of garage door systems under uniform static air pressure difference. The DASMA test simulates sustained pressure and cyclic loading in hurricane conditions, not a single peak gust reading.

The highest-tier certification you'll encounter is the Miami-Dade Notice of Acceptance (NOA), which applies specifically to the High-Velocity Hurricane Zone covering Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, where products are tested to more demanding protocols than what the rest of Florida requires. Sarasota and Manatee County aren't part of the HVHZ, so NOA certification isn't the minimum threshold here, though a door carrying an NOA label has been tested well above what your county mandates. You can look up any FL# at floridaproductapproval.com and see the exact wind load ratings, county approvals, and installation specifications on file.

What the 150 MPH Design Wind Speed Means in a Real Storm

The 150 mph number in the FBC is a 3-second gust speed measured at 33 feet above ground in open terrain. When a Category 4 storm passes through, sustained winds at residential height are typically 15 to 20 percent lower than that gust peak, but the pressure cycles against a large opening over several hours create stress patterns that single-gust testing doesn't fully capture. A door rated to 130 mph isn't a safe bet in a storm where gusts hit 140 mph, even when the sustained speed is lower, since that's exactly why the code sets the design threshold where it does for coastal Sarasota.

How to Check Whether Your Current Garage Door Is Actually Rated

If your home was permitted and built after 2002 in Sarasota or Manatee County, there's a reasonable chance your garage door met the code requirements at the time of construction. Whether it still performs to those specs depends on its age, its service history, and whether it was installed correctly and remains in good mechanical condition.

Start by looking along the inside top rail of your door, usually near the manufacturer's sticker, for an FL# number or a DASMA designation. If you find it, check the Florida Product Approval database to confirm the rating for your county's wind zone. You can also pull your original building permit documentation if you have it, since that should reference the approved products used in the build.

Older doors installed before Florida's labeling requirements may still have been permitted under the code at the time, so a missing label isn't proof of a non-compliant door. What it does mean is that you have no current documentation of its rating, which is a real gap if a watch gets posted and you're trying to assess your exposure quickly.

Age is worth treating as a separate question from the rating number. Springs, cables, and rollers all degrade over time, so a door that was rated at installation may not perform to that same standard after a decade of normal use, weather cycling, and deferred maintenance. If your door is more than 10 years old and hasn't been inspected recently, the mechanical condition question is worth addressing on its own, independent of the wind rating question.

Bracing Kits and Retrofit Options When Immediate Replacement Isn't Possible

If your door lacks hurricane certification and full replacement isn't possible before the season starts, hurricane reinforcement kits built to DASMA 115 specifications are a legitimate option for some door types. These kits add horizontal struts to the door panels, increasing resistance to the bowing and panel failure that can happen under wind pressure. They don't bring an unrated door up to code for permit purposes and aren't a substitute for a properly rated replacement, but they can meaningfully improve performance in a storm.

The installation details matter more than most people expect. An improperly installed bracing kit can actually perform worse than nothing, since the added weight and stiffness change how the door transfers load to the track and frame, and if the frame itself isn't in solid condition, the struts can't do their job regardless of how they're attached to the panels.

Our technicians assess both the door and the surrounding frame before recommending any reinforcement approach, because a bracing kit attached to a deteriorating frame isn't actually protecting anything. If your door and frame are in reasonable shape and a full replacement is still a few months out, reinforcement is a reasonable bridge. That said, if you're unsure about the frame condition, that question comes first.

Backup Power for Your Opener When the Grid Goes Down

Standard garage door openers stop working when the power cuts, so the door stays in whatever position it was in at the time of the outage, which is usually closed. That's fine structurally, though it creates a real problem if you need to move a vehicle during or immediately after the storm.

Battery backup models are the cleaner solution. Most major opener brands, including the Genie systems our technicians install regularly, offer built-in battery backup options that continue operating through outages without any manual workaround, and they're not dramatically more expensive than standard openers. The value becomes very clear the first time you're trying to get a car out of the garage at midnight after a storm when the power is still out.

If your current opener doesn't have battery backup, every opener comes with a manual release, typically a red cord hanging from the trolley rail. Pulling it disconnects the door from the drive so you can lift it by hand. The thing to know is that a door in poor mechanical condition, with worn springs or binding rollers, is significantly harder to lift manually than one that's been properly maintained, so before hurricane season is a genuinely good time for a full tune-up, even if nothing seems broken, just to confirm the door moves freely under manual operation before you need it to.

What to Do in the Days Before a Hurricane Warning

In the 48 to 72 hours before a storm watch becomes a warning, a few things are worth handling while you have time and dry conditions to work in.

Test the balance first by disconnecting the opener, lifting the door to waist height, and letting go: a properly balanced door holds position. If it falls or rises on its own, the spring tension is off and the door needs attention before the storm arrives.

Check the battery backup on your opener if you have one, and if you don't, walk every member of your household to the manual release cord and show them how to use it. It sounds like a small thing, though people who've never operated a heavy door manually under pressure will be glad they practiced.

Clear the garage of anything near the door that could become a projectile if wind gets through: bikes, chairs, garden equipment, tools.

Once a hurricane warning is issued, close the door completely and leave it closed. There's a persistent myth that cracking it open slightly helps equalize pressure, but a partially open door

during hurricane-force winds actually loses most of its structural function, since the pressure differential that creates can pull the door off its tracks entirely. Close it, lock it, and leave it alone until the storm passes.

Your Hurricane Season Garage Door Checklist

Annual Inspection

Complete Before June 1 Each Year

- ☐ Locate the FL# label on your door and verify the wind speed rating at floridaproductapproval.com
- ☐ Perform the balance test: disconnect the opener, lift the door to waist height, release, and confirm it holds position
- ☐ Inspect springs, cables, and rollers for visible wear, rust, or fraying
- ☐ Check all weather seals along the floor and sides for tight contact
- ☐ Test the manual release cord and confirm all household members know where it is
- ☐ Inspect mounting hardware and track brackets for tightness

When a Storm Watch Is Posted

48 to 72 Hours Out

- ☐ Run a full open-and-close operation test: listen for unusual noise or hesitation
- ☐ Charge opener battery backup, or confirm manual operation is smooth
- ☐ Clear the garage of items near the door that could become projectiles
- ☐ If your door hasn't been serviced in more than 2 years, call for an inspection now
- ☐ Review your homeowner's insurance policy for storm damage coverage details

When a Hurricane Warning Is Issued

36 Hours or Less

- ☐ Close the garage door fully and do not reopen until the storm has passed
- ☐ Engage the manual lock bar if your door is equipped with one
- ☐ Do NOT add improvised bracing, boards, or additional weight to the door panels
- ☐ Disconnect the opener to prevent accidental activation during power surges
- ☐ After the storm: do not force a jammed or visibly damaged door open yourself. Call a technician first

When to Schedule a Professional Inspection Before June

Most of the checklist items above you can handle yourself. The ones worth handing to a technician are the balance test if the door fails it, since spring adjustment and replacement require calibrated equipment and aren't safely DIY'd, any visible cable fraying or broken hardware, and the rating verification if you've moved into the home and genuinely don't know what's installed.

If you want someone to walk through your door's condition before hurricane season peaks and give you an honest read on where things stand, we offer free estimates with no service call fee, so it's a straightforward call to make. Reach us at (941) 226-9542, or schedule your free estimate online.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q Do I need a Miami-Dade NOA-certified door in Sarasota County?

No. Miami-Dade NOA certification is required in the High-Velocity Hurricane Zone, which covers Miami-Dade and Broward Counties specifically. Sarasota and Manatee County are outside the HVHZ, so what's required here is compliance with FBC Section 1609 and a valid Florida Product Approval (FL#) confirming the door's wind load rating for your county. An NOA-certified door will meet and exceed that requirement, but it's not the minimum threshold you need to hit.

Q My neighbor told me to crack the garage door during a hurricane to equalize pressure. Is that true?

No, and it's one of the more dangerous myths we hear every storm season. The wind rating only holds when the door is fully closed and latched, so keep it shut the entire time.

Q How old is too old for a garage door in a hurricane zone?

Fifteen years tends to be the point where mechanical condition deserves a close look, regardless of the door's original rating. Springs are typically rated for 10,000 to 15,000 cycles, and cables, rollers, and hinges all wear down over time. A well-maintained 12-year-old door in solid mechanical condition is safer than a poorly maintained 5-year-old one, so the age question and the maintenance question are related but not the same thing.

Can I install a hurricane reinforcement bracing kit myself?

The kits are sold as DIY-compatible and some homeowners install them successfully. The risk is in the specifics: struts attach to the door and frame at defined points, the hardware torque values matter, and the frame needs to be in solid condition to transfer load correctly. If you're comfortable working with door hardware and have read the DASMA 115-compliant installation guide for the specific kit, it's a reasonable project. If you're unsure about the frame condition, getting eyes on it first is the safer path.

Free Garage Door Inspection Before Hurricane Season

If you're not sure whether your garage door is rated for Florida's design wind speed, or if it's been a few years since anyone has looked at the springs, cables, and hardware, now is a good time to find out. Our technicians inspect the full door system and give you a clear picture of what you're working with, upfront, with no obligation to proceed.

(941) 226-9542

SCHEDULE FREE ESTIMATE

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