

Lessons From Elsa

BY **Richard Smith** Posted **July 16, 2021**

Elsa – a name most Barbadians will never forget. Why? Elsa was the 2nd hurricane to impact the island in 66 years. This means it was a first for many.

On Friday, July 2, 2021, a tropical storm warning issued for Barbados, quickly turned into a hurricane before heading to neighbouring islands St. Lucia and St. Vincent.

With strong lashing winds, Elsa marched across Barbados and caused fallen trees, downed utility transmission lines, devastation, and dislocation. It was the earliest the 5th named system of any Hurricane season had ever formed.

In St. Lucia, damage was sustained to several homes. One of the secondary schools in Bocage, near the capital Castries, had its roof torn from the main structure while in Soufriere, one man died when his home collapsed on him while he was asleep. St. Vincent had also been impacted with some houses losing their roofs. There were also downed utility lines and fallen trees.

How Prepared Are We?

Some people seemed quite surprised at the level of damage sustained and that calls into question, how ready were we in the region for a hurricane?

Elsa clearly showed us that we need to pay significant attention to the construction and maintenance of our housing stock. In several instances, concrete structures remained intact while their roofs separated from the main structure, exposing the contents of the houses to the elements. In other cases, entire houses collapsed from the wind force exerted on the structures. Several badly planted or maintained trees also wreaked havoc on our utility transmission infrastructure.

There was some dislocation to the water distribution network, resulting in water outages in some instances for several days, while the provision of electricity from our local service provider was also impacted.

Though levels of preparation will always vary from household to household and subsequently the level of resilience, the scenario begs the question... What lessons have we learnt from Elsa?

Lessons From Elsa!

Let Elsa be the teacher. Get Prepared!

- **Seal windows and doors**- High winds coupled with the torrential downpour, resulted in water entering homes through previously unthought of avenues such as under doors and unsealed windows.
- **Trim trees** – Trim or rid surroundings of trees that could wreak havoc on the utility distribution network
- **Install roofing straps**
- **Store water**- Both drinking water as well as water for sanitary/hygiene purposes
- **Invest in batteries** & battery packs as well as wireless chargers for gadgets.
- **Clear drains**
- **Protect home and contents with insurance coverage** – Look out for "[Lessons From Elsa Part 2](#)" for more info about insurance protection.

