

The Cost of Hurricane Downtime: How Building Owners Can Plan for Faster Recovery

After a hurricane, some damage is obvious right away. What takes longer is understanding where the damage began, how far it spread, which systems were affected, and what has to be addressed before tenants can safely return.

A building does not have to lose its roof to lose months of operating time. A failed sealant can let water into a wall assembly. A blocked roof drain can send runoff somewhere it was never supposed to go. A flooded lower level can take out an elevator control panel, and suddenly a building with an intact structure is unusable anyway.

Some conditions are obvious right away. Others take days or weeks to become clear. Moisture can track behind drywall for days before it surfaces. Flashing failures are not always visible from the ground. Each day spent confirming the source, scope, and severity of the damage can delay repairs, claims, tenant communication, and reopening decisions.

Recovery Planning Starts Before the Storm, Not After It

Most hurricane preparation focuses on protecting the glass, securing loose equipment, and checking emergency procedures. Those steps get a building through the storm. They don't cover the weeks of decisions that follow it.

Recovery planning is knowing a building's weak points before the storm ever arrives. Older roof sections. Drainage that struggles even in normal rain. Wall systems with a history of sealant failure. Known water intrusion paths, flood-prone areas, or equipment rooms that could keep a building closed longer than it needs to be.

"A building does not have to suffer major structural damage to lose weeks or months of operating time. Faster recovery starts with knowing where failures are most likely to occur."

The National Weather Service notes that hurricanes can bring multiple hazards at once, including storm surge, inland flooding, high winds, and tornadoes. No single fix covers everything. But knowing where a specific building is most vulnerable helps owners move faster once the storm passes.

The Building Envelope Is Usually Where Recovery Starts

For most commercial buildings, hurricane recovery begins at the exterior. Roof assemblies, curtain walls, storefronts, punched openings, louvers, sealants, flashing, transitions, penetrations, and drainage components all affect how wind and water move across and into the building.

When one part of that system is compromised, the impact can move well beyond the original failure point. Wind-driven rain can enter through failed joints, displaced flashing, damaged glazing seals, or roof-to-wall transitions. Water can travel behind finishes, collect in wall cavities, reach electrical rooms, or affect tenant spaces far from the point of entry.

That makes the source of the problem just as important as the visible damage. A stained ceiling tile or wet carpet may be the first sign, but the entry point could be several floors above or on another side of the building.

Building envelope reviews, field performance testing, and water intrusion investigations can help owners move from symptoms to causes. Before a storm, they can identify vulnerable conditions that may affect performance. After a storm, they can help determine where water entered, which assemblies require closer review, and which repairs should be prioritized before reopening decisions are made.

Documentation Can Keep Recovery Moving

After a storm, owners, insurers, engineers, contractors, and facility teams are all trying to work from the same set of facts.

Photos from before the storm, maintenance logs, prior inspection reports, product data, field testing reports, roof and facade observations, repair histories, and flood protection system information can help show what was in place before the event and what changed afterward.

Without those records, teams may have to reconstruct the building's history from memory while repair, claims, and reopening decisions are already underway. That can slow claims, repair planning, tenant communication, and contractor coordination.

Flooding Requires Its Own Plan

Wind gets the headlines, but water often creates the longest operational delays.

A structure can come through a hurricane with its exterior mostly intact and still sit empty because the electrical room flooded, the elevator pit filled, or the loading dock became inaccessible. Site drainage, door thresholds, below-grade equipment rooms, roof drainage, parking areas, and flood protection systems should be reviewed separately from the wind and structural checks owners may think of first.

Flood barriers, flood doors, flood gates, flood logs, and related systems also should be evaluated as part of the larger protection strategy. Testing can help manufacturers and project teams understand how these products perform against floodwater intrusion and where installation or design issues may require attention.

Recovery Is a Coordination Problem as Much as a Technical One

No single test or inspection eliminates downtime. Faster recovery depends on getting the right information to the right people quickly, so facility teams know what to check first, contractors and engineers aren't working from guesswork, and insurers and tenants get real answers instead of a long wait.

For owners managing multiple properties, this matters even more. Prioritizing buildings by exposure, age, occupancy, condition, and business impact turns a chaotic recovery into a plan with clear order.

Where Intertek Supports Hurricane Readiness and Recovery

Intertek works with owners, manufacturers, design teams, contractors, and project teams on both sides of a storm, before it hits and after it passes. Depending on the building, product, or project need, that support can include:

- Building enclosure consulting and field performance testing
- Window, door, curtain wall, storefront, and skylight testing for resistance to wind, water, air infiltration, and structural loads
- Air, water, and structural performance testing for building products and assemblies
- Hurricane-resistant building materials testing, including impact and pressure cycling tests that simulate windborne debris and hurricane conditions
- Flood testing for flood barriers, flood doors, flood gates, flood logs, flood shields, and related protection systems
- Building enclosure forensic investigations to trace water intrusion, condensation, leakage, and other performance issues
- Construction materials testing and IBC special inspections after an event or as part of repair and reconstruction work

The goal is to connect observed damage with technical findings, so owners and project teams can prioritize the systems most likely to affect safety, access, repairs, and reopening. **Click here** to learn more about Intertek's hurricane solutions.

LinkedIn Insights (Issue 034)

1.800.WORLDLAB

icenter@intertek.com

intertek.com/building

Click here to subscribe to our LinkedIn Newsletter