

## Hurricane Center chief: Technology is good

by Kentucky.com

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - If National Hurricane Center director Max Mayfield could have one phrase engraved on his tombstone, it might be "Don't focus on the skinny black line."

The science and technology used to predict hurricane paths are good, but they leave wide margins for error, Mayfield said Wednesday at the Governor's Hurricane Conference.

Hurricane Ophelia, which hit last September, is a perfect example, Mayfield said. He showed dozens of models that projected hits in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina - nowhere near the Outer Banks, where Ophelia actually went.

"There was only one model that took it anywhere near that," Mayfield said. "So again, we don't want to put too much faith in the technology."

Mayfield, FEMA officials and Gov. Jeb Bush urged residents to prepare early for the impending season, develop a plan and heed evacuation warnings as the 2007 hurricane season approaches. Bush said residents must prepare to take care of themselves for the first 72 hours after a disaster.

Computer models still can't identify rapidly intensifying hurricanes, the ones that often wreak the most havoc, Mayfield said.

"Wilma went from a tropical storm into a Category 5 hurricane in 24 hours. We've never seen that happen before," he said. "One of my greatest fears is having people go to bed at night preparing for a Category 1 hurricane and waking up to a Katrina or an Andrew."

Mayfield said it would likely be several years before technology could better track such fast growing storms. In the meantime, he and Bush urged people to prepare for hurricanes now.

Bush lauded the Florida Legislature for passing a hurricane bill to shore up county emergency operations centers and older homes, installing permanent generators in special needs shelters and adding shelter for about 100,000 people.

He said that hardening houses and helping the flailing insurance industry are the two greatest challenges facing the state.

The House and Senate recently passed a homeowners insurance bill, which attempts to make it more attractive for private insurance companies to come to Florida and provides grants for homeowners to make their houses more storm resistant.

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