Curfews imposed for area beaches

BY BETTIE FENNELL

Staff Writer

Don't expect to get back on most area beaches today.

Evacuations for Hurricane Bertha have turned into curfews at most places as beach officials planned to keep beaches closed while they assessed damage.

Kure Beach and Carolina Beach, which took heavy hits Friday, could be closed another couple of days. The New Hanover County Sheriff's Department, Wilmington Police Department and National Guard are helping keep people off those beaches and helping start today's cleanup.

Wrightsville Beach now has power but no water and sewer, said Sylvia Holleman, a town spokeswoman. Town officials won't let anyone on the island until a damage assessment is done.

In North Topsail Beach, where angry seas washed out a road and swallowed a pier, the beach could be closed several days, said Mayor Marty Bostic.

In Brunswick County, officials said they won't know if the beaches will open until Monday. Hurricane bridges at Oak Island, Holden Beach and Ocean Isle will get particular scrutiny.

Close calls behind the hurricane had begun in Wilmington and New Hanover County before Bertha moved up the coast.

Wilmington officials are getting a helping hand from the Charleston Police Department, said Charleston Chief Robert Greenberg. Thirty-five officers will arrive this morning to take over traffic control and other routine duties so Wilmington's officers can handle other problems that only they can handle, Chief Greenberg said.

Cities across the country helped Charleston after Hurricane Hugo in 1989, Chief Greenberg said. Even Charleston, he said, is trying to repay the debt. Charleston officers have helped out during California earthquakes and hurricanes in the Virgin Islands, Florida and other areas up and down the coast. Chief Greenberg briefs other departments on what to expect after storms and offers to assist with routine duties.

“We feel law enforcement is pretty important for the first three to four days,” Chief Greenberg said.

The American Red Cross will be out today with county officials assessing damage to see if the relief agency needs additional resources. Along with the Salvation Army, the Red Cross will be moving with mobile units providing food and drinks to residents trying to cleanup.

Once power is restored, the Red Cross will open a service center to interview victims of the storm who need food, clothing or shelter.

Meanwhile, city departments were also making plans to help life return to normal.

The Parks and Recreation Department planned today a preliminary damage assessment and clear major streets Friday evening. Work on other streets will begin today, and Gary Shell of the Parks and Recreation Department.

City Manager L. D. Peeler said he hadn't had time to assess damage to its waterfront dock, which was hit by a Navy ship that was scraped by the storm. The ship, which broke loose from its dock, hit the city's dock and several private boats moored there, Mr. Shell said.

County officials planned to meet early today to go over their cleanup plans, said Bruce Shell, county fire chief. To receive money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the county must follow certain guidelines established by FEMA, Mr. Shell said.

The preliminary survey of the damage will be done early today, he said. The state also plans to send in a crew to look at the county's needs, Mr. Shell said. But he was unsure when state officials would arrive.

For those who stayed put, a rough ride

By CHRIS DAVIS

A Hurricane Bertha swirled across Kure Beach on Friday, Kenneth Tesh was stubbornly on the dunes.

He was collecting the remnants of a damaged roof, "I put pans and pants and blankets to keep the clothes up," he said. For the most part, it was a success.

While thousands evacuated beaches across southeastern North Carolina, Mr. Tesh was among the few who decided to stay behind. Mr. Tesh, who has spent time in Kure Beach and on for 25 years, said he wanted to return to his 5-year-old home there as Hurricane Bertha closed in.

"I decided to stay and protect it," he said. "It wasn't as bad as I feared, but I felt it was a little better than a house fire." He boarded up all the windows, but peeked out a window to see black objects flying amid the wind and rain. His shingles are gone.

"You could just see shingles flying everywhere, it made a terrible noise. It sounded like the roof was coming off," said Mrs. Tesh, who lives in Midway but spends much of his summer at his beach house.

He sent his wife, Nettie, to stay with their daughter and her family north of Wilmington, but decided Thursday night to stay behind and watch the house, at 735 FORT Fisher Blvd.

Most of the windows were blown out by the winds, and some water seeped into the lower floor. Otherwise, it was mostly intact.

He wasn't alone in choosing to ride out the storm.

As winds began to kick up late Friday morning, Pete Atkins was putting plywood over the last few uncovered windows on his home in Long Beach. Although he hadn't lost power, he said tree limbs were whipping past his windows.

The Atkins' decision to stay proved important to a handful of houses the family found enduring in the storm. Mr. Atkins' sister, Susan, rescued the three kittens, hoping their owners could reclaim them when the storm passes.

At Wrightsville Beach, Buddy Wiles was determined to protect his property. After town officials turned off the power, Mr. Wiles said he had little to do but watch the wind and rain batter the coast.

He was looking forward to Bertha's passage. "If they let us leave, we'll go out and get dinner. If not, we'll sit here around the lantern and eat Benne-Weenies," Mr. Wiles said, laughing.

In Surf City, Edna and Jim Malcom decided to ride out the storm in their apartment, along with their four children and a neighbor.

"I can hear the shingles peel off the roof," Mrs. Malcom said around 2 p.m. It was the first hurricane for the Malcoms, who moved from Delaware two years ago after buying the Blue Roof Inn and neighboring sub shop.

Tourists in the inn's main room all left Tuesday night. Wednesday, Mrs. Malcom said, "At Ocean Isle Beach, police were determined to get everyone off the island, making one last sweep Thursday night. Officers found two people hiding out in their house. The glow of their television gave them away.

A downed power line sparks (right) at Second and Marstellar streets Friday afternoon as firefighters survey the damage.

Wilmington, N.C. (AP Photo/ROBERT F. WILLS)