Concrete Masonry Stands Up to Hurricane Charley

Winds up to 145 miles per hour left thousands homeless after Hurricane Charley tore through Punta Gorda and surrounding cities in Southwest Florida.This vicious storm claimed 17 lives and has estimated damages in the billions. In and around Punta Gorda, trailers lay toppled or blown apart. Shards of wood and metal lay scattered on lawns.As tragic as this loss is, it could have been much worse if it were not for the residential building code changes that were instituted after Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Andrew, the most destructive U.S. hurricane on record, blasted its way across south Florida, causing 24 deaths and $26.5 billion in damage -mostly due to high winds.The magnitude of damage caused by Hurricane Andrew was unprecedented in the United States. Prior to it, there had been a 25-year lull in significant hurricane activity along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and building codes were not adequate to limit the loss of life and property experienced in Hurricane Andrew. Today, codes have been strengthened and are being more rigorously enforced. Designers are required to provide a continuous load path to ensure structural integrity and provisions for wind-borne debris are much more stringent. “Because of Hurricane Andrew and other storms in this area, the residential building Dryer Vent Cleaning codes have become much more specific in Florida,” said Dennis Graber, professional engineer and director of technical publications at the National Concrete Masonry Association. “By conforming to these codes, houses were better able to withstand the onslaught of Hurricane Charley.” The National Hurricane Center notes that building codes reflect the lessons experts have learned from past catastrophes and suggest that homeowners in hurricane areas contact local building code officials to find out which requirements are necessary for home improvement projects.The Federal Emergency Management Agency encourages construction with strong, impact-resistant materials, such as concrete masonry, within homes and other structures located in hurricane-prone areas.

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