

Naming Hurricanes

Agnes. Floyd. Connie. Hugo. These names have gone down in history. Weather history, that is. They are all names of powerful hurricanes.

The names of hurricanes on the Atlantic coast have been chosen by the National Hurricane Center since 1953. Hurricanes used to be given women's names only. Starting in 1979, hurricanes have been named after both men and women.

Hurricane names are rotated every six years. So in 2010, names from 2004 will start around again. That is, unless they have already been used for a storm that hit hard. Then the country affected by the storm can ask the World Meteorological Organization to retire the name for ten years. Just like they retire ballplayers' numbers! Why would they want to do that? Cleanup from these big storms takes a long time. Lawsuits and insurance claims need time to be processed; this way the storm that caused them won't be mixed up with another storm of the same name.

Short names are easier and quicker to write and say when information needs to be passed along



Image courtesy of MODIS Rapid Response Project at NASA/GSFC.

fast. The name Fran was retired in 1996 after Hurricane Fran slammed into North Carolina with deadly force. However, Hurricane Frances showed up on the 2004 hurricane list in the Atlantic. When weather professionals talked about Frances, they shortened it to Fran. That hurricane also turned out to be a big one, so now two powerful Atlantic coast hurricanes known as Fran are in the history books! ■