



COUNTY ACCEPTS APPLICATIONS FOR EARLY HURRICANE RE-ENTRY

Essential businesses and nonprofits can help restore critical services

Monroe County Emergency Management will accept applications for its Business Early Reentry Program through Sunday, June 22. Established in 2017 after Hurricane Irma, the program was previously known as the Business Placard Early Reentry Program. The program allows qualifying essential businesses and nonprofits based in Monroe County to gain timely access to the Keys following a hurricane to help restore critical services and community lifelines.

Businesses interested in participating should review program requirements and apply at www.monroecountyem.com/placardprogram before 5 p.m. on June 22. No late applications will be accepted. If you already applied for the 2026 season, you do not need to apply again.

A significant change for 2026 is the transition from physical placards to secure digital credentials. Instead of a hard placard for a vehicle windshield, approved applicants will receive a unique QR code via email from the organization head when the county reopens for first responders and critical services. The QR code will serve as the business's official early reentry credential and can be printed or presented on a mobile device. Once the unique QR code is used, it will be invalidated.

"The move to digital credentials makes the program more efficient and secure," said Emergency Management Director Cory Schwisow. "It saves taxpayer dollars, improves accountability, reduces the risk of counterfeiting and allows us to better manage and verify authorized reentry personnel following a storm."

The new system is expected to save Monroe County more than \$4,000 annually in printing and administrative costs while providing a more reliable method for tracking authorized users.

Applicants should not apply until

they have reviewed all requirements and gathered the necessary documentation found on the website. Applications will be reviewed and responded to within 21 working days.

Each registered business is allowed to bring in only its essential personnel; the program does not include friends or family members of those workers. Entering Monroe County under a State of Emergency using an early reentry credential grants access to an area that may not yet be deemed safe. Basic life-support resources may be unavailable after a major storm, and those entering early must be self-sufficient for up to 14 days for shelter, food, water and other necessities. The focus of the program is not on gaining early access, but on assisting first responders and helping the community recover more quickly.

Residents (not businesses) who wish to enter early can volunteer with Volunteer Monroe. Hurricane recovery courses are required for residents to receive the credential. Learn more at www.monroecountyem.com/volunteer.

When safe to return, reentry windshield stickers will work for residents and homeowners. Reentry stickers can be picked up at Monroe County Tax Collector offices throughout the Florida Keys with proof of residency and vehicle registration. For more information and locations, visit www.monroecountyem.com/reentrystickers. While reentry stickers help process vehicles faster, a reentry sticker is not required to return to the Florida Keys after a disaster. Proof of residency will allow you to reenter the Keys through the checkpoint.

Hurricane season is underway. Now is the time to review your emergency plans, build disaster supply kits, and ensure your family or business is prepared before a storm threatens the Florida Keys. Learn more at www.monroecountyem.com.

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