

This article was written by Kerry Sanders, a NBC News Correspondent that stayed in the Dome of a Home during Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

'Dome Home' weathers storm

Finding security in structure built to withstand hurricanes

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

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PENSACOLA BEACH, Fla. - First light revealed that the "Dome Home" made it through the night and did exactly what it was designed to do -- survive even the worst hurricane.

I've been hunkered down with an NBC News team in a "Dome Home" right on Pensacola Beach, directly in the path of Hurricane Ivan.

The shape of the home is what you might suspect from its name. It was designed by Mark Sigler to withstand winds up to 300 miles per hour and a direct hit from a hurricane.

FEMA, the federal agency, approved the plans, and even provided a small grant to the beachfront project.

The house sits on 16 pilings, driven 17 feet into the sand. It's a solid concrete house with 5 miles of steel reinforcements for added support.

The shape of the house, in conjunction with the pilings, was designed to allow the water to literally wash around the house, rather than knock it down. And that's exactly what happened.

First light, still standing

The bad news: part of the design included break-away stairs. And in the storm surge the stairs did as intended and washed away. So we are in a house that is 22 feet above ground and we have no way down.

That is not important however because there is no down to go. We are surrounded by water.

All around, the barrier island that makes up Pensacola Beach is submerged -- and damage is widespread along this barrier island.

The 'dome home' has some wet floors but not much else.

We have a generator so we have power. The wet floors are the result of driving winds forcing the rain water into the small crevices of the home.

There was even a moment of humor this morning when a small green tree frog appeared in the kitchen. The frog discovered the 'dome home' was a good place to hide.

Relief and heavy sleep

Sigler, the Dome's designer was relieved this morning. His home, did as it was designed to do.

"I'm tired. I didn't get a lot of sleep. The sleep I got was the sleep of the dead," Sigler said. "I was amazed the way this dome home did as it was designed to do.

Considering we have some wet floors and not much more -- it's just amazing."

Craig White, an NBC News cameraman, gave an indication of how quiet it was inside the dome. "I slept through most of it," he said.

Chuck Stewart, an NBC sound engineer and a veteran of Hurricane Andrew said there was no comparison with the deadly Category 5 blast in 1992. "Wind and terror factor during Andrew was a 10," he said. "This was maybe a 5."

Unfortunately, not all of the dome's neighbors fared so well.

Three houses directly to the east are gone. The houses to the west have the windows blown out and are likely trashed inside.

"There's an alternate way to do coastal building and I think the dome might be it," said Sigler.

Kerry Sanders is an NBC News correspondent on assignment in Pensacola Beach, Fl. covering Hurricane Ivan. For more information on the "Dome Home"

see: www.domeofahome.com

URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6011773/>