

Babcock Ranch: Solar-powered "hurricane-proof" town takes direct hit from Hurricane Ian, never loses electricity

Oct. 9, 2022 CBS News

While hard-hit Fort Myers, Florida, continues its recovery from Hurricane Ian, some hope can be found 12 miles to the northeast at the planned community of Babcock Ranch. That's where Syd Kitson and his partners built an environmentally friendly, fully sustainable town that they hoped would be hurricane proof. Kitson, an eco-conscious developer and former pro football player, rode out the hurricane at Babcock Ranch. Unbelievably, none of the 5,000 people there lost power during the storm.

"We were in the bullseye," Kitson told correspondent Bill Whitaker [for this week's 60 Minutes](#). "And I remember sitting here. I had the weather on. And the weather person says, 'Well, this Category 4 hurricane is now heading for Babcock Ranch.'"

"And not only is it heading for Babcock Ranch, but it's going to be on the eastern side of the wall, which is the worst place to be," Kitson said.

"How long did the hurricane sit over you?" Whitaker asked.

"It was about eight to ten hours," Kitson said.

At the height of the storm, there were white caps on the lake in a video Kitson shot on his iPhone.

"So as soon as the sun came up the next morning, I jumped in my car and I started driving out. And the only damage were a few down trees and a few shingles off the roofs," Kitson said. "That's it. And so our recovery was maybe a day."

- **Crowdsourced photos help homeowners assess Hurricane Ian's damage**
- **Storm just beginning for Hurricane Ian insurance claims**

Babcock Ranch was designed to accommodate Florida's climate and ecosystems with indigenous plants and natural waterways for drainage; it was built 25 to 30 feet above sea level to help mitigate flooding from storm surges. There are sustainable water and sewage systems; all electric and phone lines are buried.

"We are the first solar-powered town in America," Kitson told 60 Minutes. "We have a solar field that's 150 megawatts."

That solar field features a massive solar array of 700,000 panels, built by Florida Power and Light. Those panels withstood Ian's brutal beating.

"There's a lot of water, but you don't see a single panel that's been dislodged. And there was quite a bit of wind that came through here over the last few days," Kitson told Whitaker. "Gusts of over 150, and it did not take a single panel out of here, which is really just remarkable."

"Aren't you just lucky that you happen to be on a higher level than most of the parts of Florida that got washed away?" Whitaker asked.

"That's important, but not when it comes to the wind and-- and flooding and rain. And so if that infrastructure's not built properly, you will have homes that get flooded," Kitson said. "You will have that wind damage. Particularly, you've got 150-- 160 mile-an-hour winds. If-- if this is not built properly, it's gonna come down."

Kitson said while about 5,000 people live in the Babcock Ranch right now, they have aspirations to grow to 50,000 residents.