

Hurricane Irene leaves millions without power on US East Coast

Kate Randall
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Hurricane Irene hit the East Coast of the US this weekend, leaving more than 4 million people and businesses without power and killing at least 18 as of Sunday evening. After making landfall early Saturday morning on North Carolina's Outer Banks, Irene was downgraded on Sunday to a tropical storm as it moved through the Northeast and into Canada.

The hurricane had traveled up from the Caribbean, where it inflicted extensive damage estimated at as high as US\$600 million. Irene struck Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and The Bahamas, claiming lives and destroying homes and businesses. The storm strengthened to a Category 3 hurricane as it passed over The Bahamas.

Some 2 million people along the Eastern Seaboard from the Carolinas to New England were ordered or advised to evacuate in advance of the storm. Major metropolitan transit systems were shut down and airports were closed. Oil refinery operations were disrupted and some nuclear plants were forced to reduce power.

Hurricane Irene was staggering in size, with hurricane force winds extending out 90 miles from the center and tropical storm force winds extending 260 miles. The storm produced more than a foot of rain in some areas. As it moved out and the wind and rain began to subside, authorities warned of the danger of flooding in the coming days as rivers crest.

Efforts have shifted to restoring power, clearing debris and assessing the damage. A preliminary estimate by Kenetic Analysis Corporation placed damages and losses at between \$5 billion and \$10 billion. Local and state governments already struggling with budget deficits will be hard hit by the loss of revenue and expenses related to the cleanup. Small businesses along the coastline, particularly those that

rely on summer tourism, will suffer from losses in the final weeks of the season.

The hurricane moved over the North Carolina coast at 7:30 Saturday morning, with 115 mph winds reported at Cedar Island. More than half a million state residents lost electricity. Several dozen people had to be rescued as homes were inundated with up to 4 feet of water.

At least five people died in North Carolina as a result of the storm, including a four-year-old killed when the car she was riding in crashed at an intersection where traffic lights had lost power. To the south in Florida, a surfer was killed in heavy waves connected to the hurricane; a New Jersey tourist also died in the rough surf.

The storm moved along Southeastern Virginia, where more than a million people lost power. Downed trees hit power lines, cars and homes and there was flooding in many low-lying roads and neighborhoods. Three storm-related deaths have been reported in the state. Mandatory evacuations had been ordered for at least 11 localities. Five homes in the Sandbridge area of Virginia Beach, a barrier island, reportedly sustained heavy damages from a hurricane-related tornado.

In Delaware, more than 36,000 homes and businesses were without power as of Sunday. Tornadoes also apparently touched down in the state, but no fatalities were reported. A similar number of homes and businesses were without power in Washington, DC, the nation's capital, where Irene's approach had forced a postponement of a planned dedication Sunday of a memorial to Martin Luther King Jr.

Irene made its second US landfall along the New Jersey coast, the first hurricane to hit the state in more than a century, packing winds of 75 mph. New Jersey Transit trains and buses had been shut down and mandatory evacuations had been ordered for nearly 1

million people. The storm knocked down trees, cutting power lines, and caused localized flooding.

A 20-year-old woman was found dead in her flooded car in Salem County eight hours after she had phoned police for help. New Jersey authorities warned that flooding could worsen in the coming days, and more than 100 dams were being monitored for spills.

As of Sunday, about 650,000 people were without power across New Jersey, and the number was expected to rise. Energy firm ConocoPhillips shut down its Bayway plant, and other refineries in Pennsylvania and New Jersey cut back production in advance of the storm. Exelon idled its Oyster Creek nuclear plant in Ocean County as a precaution.

The US Coast Guard closed the port of Philadelphia at 4:00 p.m. Saturday in advance of the storm. More than 20,000 Philadelphia residents remained without power. As of Sunday afternoon, floodwaters in and around the city continued to rise at a fast pace and downed power lines remained dangerous. A state of emergency was lifted at noon Sunday, and the region's SEPTA system began restoring some subway and trolley lines.

Hurricane Irene was downgraded to a tropical storm as it made its third US landfall, coming aground in the Coney Island area of Brooklyn, New York at about 9 a.m. Sunday.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo had declared a state of emergency on August 26, and ordered the deployment of 2,000 National Guard troops from the 69th Regiment Armory in New York. The region's major airports—JFK, LaGuardia and Newark—remained closed Sunday night.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg ordered an unprecedented shutdown of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority beginning at noon on Saturday, idling all 468 subway stations, 840 miles of track, thousands of city buses, as well as buses and commuter trains reaching from Midtown Manhattan to the suburbs.

City officials said it was highly unlikely that the transit system would be back to normal on Monday morning. The MTA reported Sunday that an initial survey of the system showed flooded subway tracks and powerless commuter rail networks. The system's 13 underwater tunnels have not yet been examined for flooding or other damage.

Predicted widespread storm surges and flooding of Lower Manhattan, home to the New York Stock Exchange, did not materialize. Close to 1 million homes and businesses throughout the state did lose power, about half of these on Long Island.

As tropical storm Irene moved north into New England, the storm had lost some of its power, although there were still widespread power outages, flooding and downed trees. Irene hit the Connecticut shoreline with maximum sustained winds of 60 mph winds, and thousands were evacuated along the coast. Power outages across the state totaled more than 750,000.

In Massachusetts, tens of thousands of NStar and National Grid customers remained without electricity as of Sunday night, and authorities warned that it might take days to restore power. As in New York, a decision was taken to shut down the transit system, the MBTA, although there was no official reason given for why the shutdown was necessary.

Heavy rains and high winds reached northern New England as the storm moved northward. More than 100,000 homes and businesses lost power in New Hampshire. A state of emergency was declared in Maine, and lobstermen moved their fishing gear farther offshore to avoid damage from expected rising sea levels.

Flash flooding in Vermont prompted evacuations in Southern Vermont late Sunday morning. As of midday, there were an estimated 18,000 power outages. There was one reported hurricane-related fatality when a person was swept down a river.



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