

Strongest hurricane ever recorded makes landfall in Mexico

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Hurricane Patricia, the strongest hurricane ever recorded in the Western Hemisphere, made landfall in southern Mexico Friday afternoon. With sustained wind speeds of roughly 160 miles per hour (257 kilometers per hour) and pressure measured at 924 millibars, the Category 5 hurricane impacted the coastal region from San Blas to Punta San Telmo. The eye of the storm was centered on Cuixmala, 65 miles northwest of Manzanillo.

The storm broke land in one of coastal Mexico's less populated regions, sandwiched between Manzanillo to the south and Puerto Vallarta to the north. With the Manzanillo metropolitan area population at 160,000 and the Puerto Vallarta metropolitan area population at 380,000, the death toll of the hurricane would have likely stretched into the thousands if it had broken land at either city.

Small fishing towns including Emiliano Zapata, Costa Careyes and Chamela, each with around 1,000 inhabitants, are believed to have been hit particularly hard. Due to the haphazard emergency response of the state, hundreds of residents of these cities are believed to remain trapped and at the mercy of the storm.

As of this writing, there have been no reported deaths or injuries from the hurricane, but many are predicted to perish in the days to come. The extreme winds are expected to ravage the dilapidated, makeshift housing structures in the small coastal cities, while severe waves upwards of 35 feet, as well as intense rains, will lead to widespread flash flooding, mudslides and landslides across an estimated 310 miles of coastland.

As the hurricane winds dissipate in the coastal mountains, the intense rains and flash flooding are projected to extend across much of central Mexico, potentially damaging the country's agricultural region. The closest major metropolitan area in the hurricane's

path is Guadalajara, whose seven adjacent municipalities have a combined population of 4.3 million, making it Mexico's second most populous metropolitan area. Located to the east of the Sierra Madre Mountains, Guadalajara will not incur any wind damage.

Flash flood warnings extend all the way to the US, stretching across Texas and into Louisiana, where they are currently estimated to last until Sunday. Forecast models indicate that parts of southern Texas will receive an additional 5 to 8 inches of rain by Sunday, further exacerbating the severe flooding currently wracking the state independently of the hurricane.

The Mexican government declared a state of emergency in Colima, Nayarit and Jalisco states Friday, prompting the evacuation of an estimated 3,500 from Jalisco. 3,000 military personnel were sent into Jalisco to set up and enforce checkpoints to prevent people from driving during the storm.

On Thursday, the Mexican government reported that they had opened 1,782 shelters across Michoacan, Colima, Jalisco, and Nayarit, with a collective capacity of 258,000 people. However, early reports indicate that a mere 1,075 people were housed in the shelters by the time the hurricane struck.

Officials in Manzanillo began distributing sandbags Thursday afternoon, while residents were told to evacuate. A lack of emergency planning meant that thousands of fleeing coastal residents encountered hours of traffic, but few are believed to have remained trapped in the hurricane's path on the highways.

While the damage wrought by Hurricane Patricia is projected to be far less than disastrous tropical cyclones such as Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the utter lack of preparation by the Mexican government once again

reveals the irrational and outmoded nature of capitalism.

The corrupt Mexican political establishment, forewarned by meteorologists that the hurricane would bring unprecedented wind speeds and flooding to coastal cities, mounted the bare minimum of an emergency response to carry out evacuations and ensure the safety of nearby residents. According to media reports, by noon on Friday there were no more bus tickets to purchase to escape the storm, and gas had run out in some areas.

The steep topography of the Mexican coast in the region is such that the danger of flooding and surging is minimal in the mountains just a few miles east of the shoreline. However, the government carried out no comprehensive evacuation to transport evacuees to shelter locations, instead merely issuing warnings.

Initially registered as a tropical storm on Wednesday, the hurricane's strength grew rapidly, peaking at sustained wind speeds of 200 miles per hour (305 kilometers per hour) and a pressure of 879 millibars, both historical records for the Western Hemisphere and placing the hurricane among the worst in world history. In about 24 hours, the maximum sustained winds swelled from 85 miles per hour Thursday morning to more than 200 miles per hour by early Friday.

Meteorologists have explained that the storm grew so tremendously because it encountered the perfect environment for growth, including warm ocean water due to a record El Nino, low wind shear in the upper atmosphere and a compact storm structure. Many scientists have in turn pointed to the impact of climate change, which for decades has caused sea surface temperatures to rise, itself contributing to the record El Nino conditions.

“This is a fairly good example of what we expected to happen. The theory and models said one thing global warming would do is have the strongest storms get stronger,” James Kossin, atmospheric research scientist at the Space Science and Engineering Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told *Wired*.

The failure of capitalist governments worldwide to adequately address the issue of climate change virtually ensures that super storms like Hurricane Patricia will become increasingly regular. The likelihood that such storms will hit major population centers across the globe, causing massive damage and loss of life akin to

that of Typhoon Haiyan, grows each year, further exposing and exacerbating the global crisis of capitalism.



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