

# At least four dead, 18,000 rescued in historic flooding in Louisiana

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At least four people have died, 8,000 people are in shelters and 18,000 people have had to be rescued from record-breaking floods in south Louisiana and portions of neighboring Mississippi over the weekend. A tropical storm-like weather system stalled over the region, pouring more than two feet of rain in some areas since Friday.

Baton Rouge, the state capital and center of a metropolitan area that is home to more than 800,000 people, was particularly hard hit. CNN reported rainfall totals of more than eight inches at the city's airport on Friday, the heaviest August rainfall since records began a century ago. In suburban Livingston Parish, according to the news network, more than 17 inches of rain were recorded on Saturday, making the storm a 1-in-1,000 year weather event.

A spokesman for the state's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness said that more than 2,000 homes were flooded in the Baton Rouge area and at least 500 in Tangipahoa Parish, which lies halfway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans on the northwest shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Dozens of roads were closed throughout the weekend and residents reported widespread cell phone outages. Some 37,000 people were without power as of Sunday evening, according to the *Advocate*. State government offices and the campus of Louisiana State University were closed through the weekend.

Rainstorms contributed to record floods along local rivers, with the Amite River expected to exceed its previous high by six feet in the town of Magnolia, according to the Weather Channel. Floodwaters cut off access to entire riverside communities.

Sections of Interstate 10, the main highway connecting New Orleans and Baton Rouge, as well as Interstate 12 were closed over the weekend. State

officials urged motorists to stay off the roads as much as possible. Thousands of motorists were stranded by floodwaters overnight, with officials distributing emergency supplies by helicopter to 1,500 motorists on I-12. One of the weekend's fatalities occurred when a truck attempted to drive through a flooded state highway in St. Helena Parish.

Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards announced a statewide state of emergency on Friday, and has requested that President Barack Obama issue a federal disaster declaration, which would facilitate assistance from the federal government. The *Advocate* reported that Edwards was forced to evacuate the governor's mansion when floodwaters reached the basement, where security operations were being coordinated. Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant also declared a state of emergency on Sunday for four counties in the southern portion of the state.

As always during natural disasters in the United States, the military has been deployed to the affected areas, with nearly 2,000 National Guard troops activated by Governor Edwards, ostensibly to assist with rescue operations. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the city of New Orleans, which has been largely spared from the recent flooding, was occupied by thousands of National Guard troops, whose deployment impeded the flow of humanitarian assistance in favor of cracking down on "looters."

This weekend's floods were the second such severe flooding event in the region, among the poorest in the country, in less than a year. In late December and early January, record flooding along the Mississippi River south of St. Louis, Missouri killed at least two dozen people, prompting then-Governor Bobby Jindal to declare a state of emergency. According to *Climatesignals.org*, extreme precipitation has increased

27 percent from 1958 to 2012, largely due to global warming.



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