

Residents ordered to evacuate as Hurricane Matthew approaches US East Coast

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Residents in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina began evacuating the coastal regions on Wednesday and Thursday as Hurricane Matthew moved northward to the East Coast of the US. The category 4 hurricane, with winds up to 140 mph, is expected to make landfall in Florida late Thursday evening or early Friday morning.

As of Thursday evening, authorities were reporting that the hurricane had already caused nearly 300 deaths in Haiti, with the death toll continually rising. Homes and shanties there were left in ruins, engulfed by a deluge of mud, while standing water is mixing with human and animal waste.

The flooded villages in the southern peninsula of the impoverished nation have been largely cut off from the rest of the island. Officials estimate that 350,000 people have been affected by the hurricane, while over 15,000 have been displaced. Prior to the hurricane, some 60,000 Haitians remained homeless as a result of the 2010 earthquake.

Hurricane Matthew is expected to be first category 4 hurricane to make landfall in the region from West Palm Beach to the border of Florida and Georgia since records began in 1851, according to Philip Klotzbach, a meteorologist at Colorado State University. Since 1950, only three hurricanes have impacted the Bahamas with stronger winds.

“Even if we get lucky and the storm stays offshore, the odds are high that it will be close enough that life-threatening flooding will inundate coastal sections and the winds will cause widespread damage,” Bryan Norcross, a meteorologist with the Weather Channel, wrote Thursday morning on his Facebook page.

“If the storm makes landfall, severe to catastrophic damage is possible, likely for hundreds of miles,” he said. “There has never been a hurricane like this in East

Central Florida. There is nothing to compare it to.”

The National Weather Service is warning that locations in East Central Florida “may be uninhabitable for weeks or months.”

Sustained winds of over 100 mph are expected, and even areas further inland over Florida could see sustained winds over 50 mph, which will lead to widespread power outages. Florida Power & Light anticipates that 2.5 million customers will lose power.

The storm surge could see the ocean water rise as high as 7 to 11 feet above dry land, destroying structures along the coast.

Air travel in Florida has practically ceased. By Thursday evening, more than 3,785 flights had been canceled nationwide due to the hurricane.

In the largest mandatory evacuation since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, officials have urged over 2 million people residing in the coastal regions of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina to leave their homes.

Roads in Florida were overcrowded as many of the 1.5 million residents ordered to evacuate fled the area. There were long lines at gas stations. Store shelves quickly emptied as people stocked up on supplies. State officials warned residents that there would likely be attempts at price gouging, with businesses hiking prices on gas, food and accommodations.

“This storm will kill you,” Florida Governor Rick Scott warned on Thursday. A direct hit by the hurricane, he said, could result in “massive destruction.” The governor has activated half of the state’s National Guard, while President Obama has declared a state of emergency in Florida.

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal ordered a state of emergency in 30 counties and, for the first time in 17 years, ordered a mandatory evacuation of the entire coast of the state.

In South Carolina, an estimated 175,000 residents evacuated on Wednesday, and a similar number were expected to leave by Thursday. Governor Nikki Haley recommended that residents move at least 100 miles inland to ensure their safety.

As residents fled the lowlands by car in South Carolina, Sheriff deputies shot and killed a motorist, 35-year-old Lucas M. Felkel, after he knocked down traffic cones at a checkpoint and drove away. When officers caught up to the man several miles away, Sheriff Duane Lewis claims that Felkel brandished a gun and shot at deputies who then returned fire, injuring the man. Felkel later died of his wounds at a hospital. None of the deputies were wounded, and four have been placed on administrative leave.

In North Carolina, Governor Pat McCrory has declared a state of emergency for half the counties in the state, although it appears the state will avoid a direct hit from the hurricane.

While politicians have called for mass evacuations of the coastal areas—which, therefore, will allow them to place the blame for the inevitable fatalities on the individuals who “chose” to stay—only the most minimal infrastructure has been put into place help those needing to evacuate. Inevitably, it will be the poorest and most vulnerable of the population who will be left to ride out the storm on their own.

No financial assistance is offered to people who cannot afford the cost of evacuating. The resources provided come in the form of the National Guard and other repressive sections of the state, which are being mobilized not to help individuals weathering the storm, but to protect private property and preserve law and order.

The residents who remain consist largely of individuals and families without the resources necessary to evacuate—reliable cars, extra money for food and lodging. For example, in North Charleston, located on the coast of South Carolina, many of the residents of the poorer and predominantly African-American neighborhoods stayed behind.

“We can’t afford to travel the road,” Adrian Ford, a North Charleston resident, told the *Los Angeles Times*. She was loading blankets and baby supplies into her car when the newspaper spoke to her. She and her entire family are planning to hunker down at her residence, which is located on higher ground.

As with all natural disasters in the United States, Hurricane Matthew will reveal the stark social inequalities that characterize all facets of American life. Tens of thousands of those affected will be unable to withstand the financial shock brought on by the hurricane. The damage caused by the storm will be exacerbated by the country’s crumbling infrastructure, as levees break, electric grids fail, bridges collapse and sewage systems overflow.

The media will briefly cover the suffering of the most vulnerable layers of society that it typically ignores. Politicians will shed crocodile tears in front of the TV cameras and offer empty promises and assurances. Once the storm passes, no effort will be made to prepare for future natural disasters, while those affected will be forgotten and left to fend for themselves.

While the political establishment can mobilize seemingly unlimited resources to prop up the financial system at home and fund destructive wars abroad, it will claim that there is “no money” available to improve the country’s decaying infrastructure or provide adequate aid to the victims of the hurricane.



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