

Millions evacuate as Hurricane Harvey hits Texas

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26 August 2017

Hurricane Harvey hit the Texas coast late Friday night bringing a combination of heavy rain, “life-threatening” storm surges, flooding and strong winds. The National Weather Service in Houston warned that the storm could leave swaths of Southern Texas “uninhabitable for weeks or months.”

The storm was a Category Two hurricane Friday morning, but was bumped up a level to Category Three by the afternoon, and a Category Four by evening when it made landfall. At approximately 10 PM local time, Harvey made landfall near Rock Port, Texas, just 30 miles northeast of Corpus Christi, the heart of Texas’ oil refining industry with a metro area population of nearly 450,000.

President Donald Trump signed an order declaring Texas a disaster area shortly after the storm made landfall, opening up federal resources to assist with the response to damage from the high winds and rain.

Meteorologists are predicting as much as 35 inches, or nearly 89 centimeters, of rain. To put this figure in perspective, the expected rain amounts to nearly an entire year’s worth for these coastal Gulf cities. Life-threatening storm surge waters are expected to reach anywhere from 6 to 12 feet above ground level. Catastrophic flooding and 100-plus mile per hour winds are expected in many areas.

Storm preparations began for much of the Texas coast starting on Wednesday with warnings issued to people and businesses in the areas expected to be hit the hardest. The Coast Guard announced Thursday it would be sending shallow-depth vessels to Texas and Louisiana that are capable of responding in flooded urban areas, and also ordered a nearly total closure of ports in Houston, Texas City, Galveston, Freeport and Corpus Christi.

While most preparations are going forward more or

less as usual, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs Border Protection (CBP) have strayed from previous hurricane protocol by keeping its immigration checkpoints in Texas open in spite of the storm. “We’re not going to impede anybody getting out of here, but at the same time we’re a law enforcement agency, so we still have to conduct our duties,” said CBP official Roberto Rodriguez.

During Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Isaac in 2012 ICE and CBP “temporarily suspended enforcement measures during evacuations” which could compel many families of immigrants to risk their lives staying behind instead of evacuating for fear of deportation.

As of Friday, governors had declared a “State of Emergency” in 30 counties in Texas and statewide for Louisiana. Texas officials announced mandatory evacuations for seven coastal counties: Calhoun County, San Patricio County, Refugio County, Brazoria County, Jackson County, Victoria County and Matagorda County. In four of those countries, officials warned those who chose to stay behind that their rescue could not be guaranteed. Voluntary evacuations have been issued for residents in other areas. At least eight million people total are under hurricane warnings for the storm.

Louisiana could also get 10 to 15 inches of rain. Flood warnings are in effect for Louisiana and northern Mexico. The storm poses a more acute threat in the city of New Orleans which has a drainage system teetering on the edge of collapse. Last week a storm which brought ten inches of rainfall within three hours led to hundreds of homes, businesses and automobiles being flooded out in low-lying neighborhoods.

With more rain and thunderstorms expected through the weekend and a drainage system that is now barely functional, the city is bracing for a potential repeat of

last week's flooding, which itself followed severe flooding in late July. Louisiana's Democratic governor, John Bel Edwards, has declared a state of emergency for New Orleans lasting through the end of the month and into September.

Harvey is the first major hurricane to hit the US in twelve years. Meteorologists are comparing it to Hurricane Bret, which hit Texas on August 22, 1999 in Kenedy County, just south of Corpus Christi. Central Kenedy County received more than 15 inches of rain over two days during the storm, doing about \$88 million in damage in 2017 figures. Four people died in the storm.

Most of the local politicians have gone through the typical protocol for dealing with such disasters. For his part, President Trump confirmed on Twitter that he had spoken with the governors of Texas and Louisiana, saying his administration is "closely monitoring" the storm and will "assist as needed." In another tweet, the president said he had been briefed by officials from the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA as well as other top members of his cabinet.

All proclamations from the White House to "assist" communities in the aftermath of natural disasters ring hollow since the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 which serves as the most horrific example of natural disasters turned man-made disasters in recent memory. The fallout caused by the complete incompetence and callous indifference of the political establishment in the aftermath of the storm killed at least 1,800 people across five states. One million people were displaced from their homes and forced to move to cities throughout the region.



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