

Flooding continues to inundate Gulf Coast as Harvey makes landfall in Louisiana

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31 August 2017

Nearly one week after Hurricane Harvey made landfall in southeastern Texas, the historic scope of the damage and destruction caused by the storm is coming into sharper focus. Rescue efforts continued Wednesday in Houston and other areas as the storm continued to inundate the Gulf Coast with heavy rains and flooding.

Harvey is expected to far surpass any previous storm as the costliest in American history, with at least \$190 billion in damage and destruction, equivalent to one percent of the US gross domestic product, according to an estimate by AccuWeather. The damage from Harvey far exceeds the combined impact of Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed much of New Orleans in 2005, and Hurricane Sandy, which devastated the East Coast in 2012.

The official death toll in Texas remained at 30 Wednesday, but it is expected to rise as the true extent of the damage is surveyed, now that the storm has moved east. Many Houston residents stayed in their homes since there was no mandatory evacuation order before the storm. They became trapped as the flood waters rose.

Houston, the fourth largest city in the US, has been devastated by the record rains and flooding. The storm dropped the most rain ever recorded in the lower 48 states with a record 52 inches falling in Mont Belvieu, just east of Houston. Up to 30 percent of Harris County's 1,800 square miles were flooded by the storm, covering an area larger than New York City and Boston combined.

Flood waters in Houston are not expected to recede for days or even weeks. Even after the city dries out, many parts will be uninhabitable. It is estimated that as many as 40,000 homes in the sprawling city and surrounding areas have either been damaged or

destroyed. Large areas have been fouled by water containing toxic chemicals, pesticides and sewage.

Some 32,000 people are currently in shelters across the region, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). At least 10,000 of this number remain packed into the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, which is at double its capacity. Another 1,800 have been placed by FEMA in area hotels.

Since the storm made landfall on Friday, 4,200 people and 1,000 pets have been rescued by the Coast Guard. However, residents report that the Coast Guard and other government agencies have either been slow to respond to distress calls or completely unresponsive. In the face of criminal government negligence, those who comprise the volunteer force of fishermen and workers dubbed the Cajun Navy have continued to risk their lives responding to distress calls put out on social media by the thousands.

Even as stranded residents continue to be rescued from the flood waters, a law-and-order crack-down is being prepared in anticipation of a potential eruption of social anger in the aftermath of the storm. Texas' Republican governor, Gregg Abbott, announced Wednesday that 14,000 Texas National Guard troops have been deployed to the city and surrounding areas and 10,000 additional National Guard members from across the country are on their way.

Houston's Democratic mayor, Sylvester Turner, announced a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew of indefinite duration, effective Tuesday, ostensibly to stop "property crimes against evacuated homes." In the face of criticism that the curfew restricted the efforts of rescue workers, who could be arrested or detained for being out late, Turner altered the curfew to start at midnight.

Turner took to Twitter Wednesday to ignorantly reject criticisms that the absence of zoning laws in Houston had contributed to the record level of flooding. “Zoning wouldn’t have changed anything,” he said. “We would have been a city with zoning that flooded.”

Scientists and engineers had warned repeatedly in recent years that Houston was due for a catastrophic flood due to the unrestrained and haphazard character of development in and around the city. Free from any restrictions, developers in Houston and Harris County have paved over significant tracts of wetlands and prairie lands, which absorb rainfall and are critical to flood control. There have been repeated flood events in recent years outside of areas designated by FEMA to be at high risk.

While the rains abated Wednesday in Houston, Harvey continued to bring devastation to areas further east. After meandering back out into the Gulf of Mexico, Harvey made its second Gulf Coast landfall as a tropical storm on Wednesday near Cameron, Louisiana, bringing record rainfall and flooding to the border region between southeastern Texas and southwest Louisiana.

One hundred miles east of Houston, the Texas cities of Beaumont and Port Arthur, with a combined population of more than 170,000, were completely overwhelmed by flood waters Tuesday night. Hundreds of people were stranded on their roof tops, in attics and on the tops of vehicles throughout the area. The Bob Bowers Civic Center, set up as an emergency shelter in Port Arthur, flooded Tuesday night, forcing the evacuation of approximately 100 people who had taken shelter there from the storm.

The flooding Tuesday night into Wednesday morning also forced the complete shutdown of the Motiva oil refinery, the largest such facility in the United States.

Dennis, a retired oil worker from the ExxonMobil refinery in Beaumont, Texas, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that he and his family had to flee Winnie, Texas for a hotel after their home filled with two feet of water.

“This is the worst I’ve ever seen, even with Hurricane Ike in 2008,” he said. “We’ve been in our home for nine years and it never flooded. We live in an area above sea level, mostly rice lands and farming area. The big refineries are in Beaumont and Port Arthur. Exxon is only letting essential personnel in and

operations have been reduced due to the storm.”

Exxon Mobil’s Baytown, Texas plant is shut down, along with Shell’s Deer Park refinery, while the Beaumont facility is working at reduced capacity. All told, the storm has forced at least 15 refineries to be taken off line from Corpus Christi to Port Arthur, representing the closure of 25 percent of US refining capacity.

More than one million barrels per day are offline just from the Houston/Galveston area. Analysts say the refinery outages could last for weeks or months, leaving thousands out of work.



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