

Hurricane Ophelia's tail hits Ireland and UK

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The Republic of Ireland and large parts of the UK was battered by the remnants of Hurricane Ophelia Monday.

Strong winds led to extensive damage and three fatalities. While Ireland was the worst affected, the storm also hit West Wales, Scotland, south west England and the north of England.

A woman in her fifties died when a tree landed on her car in West Waterford, while her companion, a woman in her seventies, was hospitalised. A downed tree crushed a car, claiming the male driver, in Ravensdale, Dundalk. A 30-year-old man died in a chainsaw accident in Cahir, Co Tipperary, while attempting to remove a tree felled by the storm. Another man narrowly escaped with his life when a tree fell on his car in Middleton.

As the storm made its way northeast, winds left 360,000 homes and businesses without power in the Republic of Ireland. Power was also lost to thousands of homes in Northern Ireland—18,000 affected—and Wales. Tens of thousands remained without electricity during Monday evening. Full power for all is not expected to be restored for all for at least ten days.

Winds reached 95 mph in many places and up to 109 mph in Fastnet Rock.

Waves as high as 27 feet were reported at sea in the south of Ireland. Winds ripped the roofs off many buildings and uprooted trees. A gust tore the roof from Douglas Community School, while the soccer stadium in nearby Cork, which was hit by gusts of up to 105 mph, had its roof blown off and was badly damaged.

The Gardai (Irish Police) advised people to stay indoors and refrain from travelling for their own safety. The Fine-Gael minority government ordered 1,000 troops on standby.

During the evening, police in Carrickfergus had to evacuate residents, who were at risk of flooding, due to tidal surges. They were taken to a local council hall to

stay the night.

Met Eireann issued a “status red alert” ahead of the ex-Hurricane’s landing, which despite being downgraded to a post-tropical cyclone was potentially life threatening due to flying roof tiles and debris, falling trees and high seas, with waves pounding the coastline.

The Met Office, the UK’s national weather service, warned that the storm, which originated in the Atlantic as a Category 1 hurricane, was a potential danger to life. It issued a yellow warning of extreme winds in the West of Scotland, the North of England and Wales.

In west Wales, winds reached 90 mph in Aberdaron. Four thousand properties were without power in Camarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Powys.

Southwest Scotland was hit by winds of 80 mph during Monday evening and the heavily populated central belt, including Glasgow, faced 60 mph gusts. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency issued a series of flood alerts, while parts of England also braced themselves for flooding, with three flood warnings issued.

All schools and colleges in the Republic of Ireland closed their doors Monday and will remain closed Tuesday until the worst of the storm is over. Some head teachers berated the authorities for not informing them earlier about the closures—many had to contact parents and pupils late on Sunday night.

As a precaution, 80 schools in West Wales were shut, as well as all 48 on the Isle of Anglesey.

Due to the severe weather, all trains, ferries, buses and trams stopped running in Ireland, while Ryanair, Aer Lingus, British Airways, Qatar Airlines, Air France, City Jet, Emirates and KLM grounded flights in and out of Dublin airport. Passengers were told to check their flights from Belfast airport while Manchester airport in northwest England cancelled 20

flights. Edinburgh Airport cancelled all flights to Ireland.

Former US President Bill Clinton was forced to cancel his planned visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont, to discuss the ongoing crisis in which there has been no functioning devolved government for nine months. Stormont suffered a power outage due to the storm.

The famous Peace Bridge across the River Foyle in Londonderry was closed as a precaution.

Debris strewn everywhere is expected to cause major public safety problems for days to come. According to Travelwatch NI, by 6 p.m., 179 trees/branches had fallen, causing chaos on roads. Several trees were brought down near to each other making roads impassable.

Five flights to UK airports were forced to make emergency landings, reporting mysterious “smoke smells” in cockpits that were thought to be linked to the remnants of the hurricane.

Many parts of the UK experienced eerie sepia light. Other areas reported “sunset at midday” as the sun glowed red in the sky due to particles of dust from the Sahara and debris from the wildfires in Portugal and Spain sucked over by Hurricane Ophelia.

Hurricane Ophelia was the worst storm to hit Ireland in 50 years. Extreme weather is hitting more parts of the world, with increasing frequency and ferocity, due to global warming. At least 27 people have been killed this week in the hundreds of wildfires in Portugal, leading to a state of emergency being declared in an area amounting to half of the country.

As with the hurricanes which have devastated large parts of the United States and Caribbean in recent months, evidence points to the fact that the Irish government did little to ensure public safety and prepare for what was known well in advance to be a massive storm.

Eugene Murphy, the flood relief spokesman of Ireland’s other main party, Fianna Fáil, seeking to score political points, noted that the National Emergency Coordination Committee met on Sunday. But all local authorities, civil defence and emergency services “were not put on stand-by. ... Hurricane Ophelia is due to be the worst storm to hit this country in over a decade, but we have less than 24 hours to prepare for it.”

According to Dr. Dann Mitchell of the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol, “There is evidence that hurricane-force storms hitting the UK, like Ophelia, will be enhanced in the future due to human-induced climate change.

“While tropical hurricanes lose strength when they travel north, they can re-intensify due to the nature of the atmospheric circulation at UK latitudes. It is the rise in temperatures over most of the Atlantic that is a primary driver of this, a clear signature of human-induced climate change.”

Writing in the *Guardian*, Environment Editor Damian Carrington said, “An increase in hurricane-force winds wreaking havoc across the Britain and Ireland is entirely consistent with global warming, according to scientists.” Higher temperatures create “more energy in the climate system, especially in the oceans, which is where big storms derive their energy from.”

A report commissioned in May by the Association of British Insurers (ABI)—carried out by the Consultancy firm Air Worldwide in conjunction with the UK Met Office—warned of the disastrous consequences of even a minimal increase in global warming by 1.5° C. The ABI called for action to reinforce buildings to withstand damage from wind destruction, which the report projects would likely increase by over 50 percent across the UK.

A 2,000-page report produced over three years by 80 experts for the Committee on Climate Change found the UK completely unprepared for the effects of global warming—which could see deadly heatwaves with temperatures in the high 30° C and up to 48° C in London, more flooding and water shortages.

The indifference of the ruling elite to the safety and wellbeing of the population was demonstrated by Theresa May on becoming prime minister last year. One of her first acts was the abolition of the Department of Energy and Climate Change.



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