

# Tropical Storm Henri brings extensive flooding to the Northeastern US

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Tropical Storm Henri made landfall in the state of Rhode Island on Sunday, having recently been downgraded from a minimal hurricane. This is the second tropical storm to hit the Northeast US in less than two months, after Elsa in early July. Heavy rain falling on already saturated ground has resulted in substantial flooding, compounded along the coast by the coincidence of an astronomical high tide.

On making landfall, Henri had sustained winds of approximately 60 miles per hour (97 kilometers per hour), with gusts up to 70 mph (113 kph). Waves of greater than 19 feet (nearly 6 meters) were reported southeast of Block Island, off the eastern end of Long Island.

After landfall, the storm first turned westward, toward New York. Reports indicated that the effects of the storm were being felt from eastern Pennsylvania, through New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Residents in some coastal areas in Connecticut were evacuated, and widespread flooding was reported extending far inland. Local evacuations were also reported in New Jersey, where flooding of up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) was observed.

New York City experienced record rainfall, with an accumulation of nearly two inches in just one hour measured in Central Park and a total of over seven inches by Sunday evening. The National Weather Service reported that the Central Park rainfall was likely the highest one-hour total ever recorded in the park. The heavy rain forced the abrupt termination of an open-air concert in the park, a likely COVID-19 super-spreader event with thousands in attendance. Commuter rail service in the New York metropolitan area was significantly disrupted. The emergency rescue of 86 people, including 16 children, was undertaken after a number of vehicles were submerged by significant flooding in Newark, New Jersey.

Throughout the region, more than 140,000 residential

customers were reported to have lost power on Sunday.

As of Monday morning, the forward motion of Henri, now downgraded to a tropical depression with winds of 30 mph (48 kph), had slowed, resulting in additional rainfall to already flooded areas but reducing the wind damage. With a turn to the east, the affected areas spread into Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. Despite the efforts of utility crews, an estimated 65,000 customers remained without power, including 42,000 in Rhode Island and 10,000 in Connecticut.

Many lost power due to severed electrical lines cut down by fallen branches and toppled trees, whose roots had been loosened in the saturated ground. By midweek, temperatures throughout the region are predicted to reach into the high 80s or 90s with high humidity, creating a significant health burden for those who lack power to run air conditioners.

Additional rainfall of 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 centimeters) is expected before the storm departs, with overall storm totals of up to 12 inches (30.5 cm). More than 33 million people remain under flood watch or warning as of this writing. The storm is expected to progress eastward, crossing Massachusetts, eventually exiting into the Gulf of Maine Tuesday morning.

Federal disasters have been declared by President Joe Biden in much of the affected areas, allowing emergency funds to be allocated for recovery efforts. AccuWeather estimates that the total damage and economic losses from Tropical Storm Henri, so far, at between \$6 and \$8 billion. As of this writing, no Henri-related deaths have been reported.

Over the past decade, beginning with the back-to-back impacts of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee (2011), followed by Superstorm Sandy (2012) among others, there has been an increase of significant storms hitting the Northeast, a predicted effect of human-induced climate change. These storms are causing severe impacts,

not only to heavily populated coastal areas but substantially into the interior, primarily due to heavy rains resulting in major flooding. Irene, for example, was the greatest natural disaster in Vermont since a major flood in 1927.

This trend is expected to worsen in the coming years as the effects of climate change intensify. Rising sea levels will drive coastal flooding ever farther inland, and warming oceans and atmospheric temperatures will tend to increase the moisture-carrying capacity of storms, resulting in greater inland rainfall and more flooding.

A rise in catastrophic flooding is already being seen in many places around the globe. During this year alone, major often deadly storms have impacted Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan and Tennessee in the US, to name but a few. Similar disasters have occurred in other countries, including Germany, Turkey and China, again, to name but a few. These storms are manifestations, along with massive wildfires and droughts in other regions of the planet, of human-induced climate change.

In advance of the storm, various public officials issued the now perfunctory warnings about its potential impacts. Typical was the statement by Andrew Cuomo, soon to be ex-governor of New York:

As always, we will do everything we can to help our local partners with any and all response and recovery operations. This storm is unpredictable and, although it appears to be moving further east, the threats of storm surge, coastal and inland flooding, high winds and power outages remain very real. Now is the time to be smart—pay close attention to weather reports, and, for the safety of yourself, your family, and responders, avoid any unnecessary travel.

Or Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont:

I urge everyone in Connecticut to take this storm seriously. Prepare to shelter in place Sunday and into early Monday morning. Plan for power outages that could last for an extended period. Be prepared for urban and coastal flooding, particularly if you live in a designated flood zone. The state is deploying resources and working with our federal counterparts to react quickly and

respond as necessary. We will continue monitoring the storm and provide updates through the coming days.

In addition, Cuomo made the exceedingly insightful observation that “In the Hudson Valley you have hills, you have creeks, the water comes running down those hills and turns a creek into a ravaging river.” In effect, he declared that this is the way things are, get used to it.

Luckily, the impact of Tropical Storm Henri did not turn out as bad as it might have been. Nevertheless, the increasing frequency and severity of such storms is inevitable unless a serious effort is made to address climate change. Otherwise, according to the ruling class, they are simply things the population must endure. In their view, the devastation and death caused by these storms and other effects of climate change must be normalized.

In effect, the ruling class’s criminal response, or lack thereof, to climate change mirrors its policy toward the COVID-19 pandemic, that we must “learn to live with it,” with all the disastrous consequences this holds. The necessary measures to truly address climate change are simply beyond the capacity of the capitalist system to undertake. For the working class, on the other hand, this is increasingly a life-and-death issue.

As stated clearly in the Perspective published on the WSWS Monday, “Extreme weather, climate change and the case for socialism,” the working class must take decisive political action to replace the chaos and greed of capitalism with a planned socialist economy in order to avoid disaster.



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