

Hurricane Ida devastates central Gulf Coast, continues to bring heavy rain across mid-Atlantic

Trévon Austin
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Millions of residents along the US Gulf Coast, who have endured Hurricane Ida's devastating winds, storm surge and torrential rain, now face widespread power and water outages that are expected to last for weeks, coupled with a heat wave that will push temperatures around or above 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C). According to PowerOutage.US, more than 1 million homes and businesses in Louisiana, including the entire city of New Orleans, 60,000 customers in Mississippi and 16,000 in Alabama are without power.

The hurricane, now a tropical depression, crashed into the Louisiana coast as a Category 4 hurricane with winds up to 150 mph (241 kph) on Sunday, ripping roofs off of buildings and collapsing power lines. In parts of New Orleans and surrounding cities, rapidly rising floodwaters trapped drivers in their cars and forced families to take shelter in their attics. The Karnofsky Shop, a historic brick building in downtown New Orleans where jazz musician Louis Armstrong worked as a child, was completely reduced to rubble by Ida's strong winds.

Double-digit rainfall totals have been confirmed across Louisiana and Mississippi. Hurricane Ida dropped more than 10 inches (25.4 cm) of rain in the past 48 hours over portions of Louisiana and Mississippi, leading to life-threatening flash flooding. At least two weather stations in Louisiana have reported more than a foot (30.5 cm) of rainfall since early Sunday. One of the two stations, near New Orleans, received a foot and a half (45.7 cm) of rainfall during the same period.

The Louisiana Department of Health announced the second death related to the storm Monday afternoon but warned the death toll will definitely rise. One

unidentified man "drowned after his vehicle attempted to go through floodwater near I-10 and West End Blvd. in New Orleans," the department said in a post on Twitter. On Sunday, a 60-year-old male in Ascension Parish also died after a tree fell onto his home.

Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards said search-and-rescue operations were underway, but crews have not been able to access some of the hardest hit areas in the state.

"We have one confirmed death, but I don't want to mislead anyone," Edwards told MSNBC before the second death was confirmed. "Robust search and rescue is happening right now, and I fully expect that that death count will go up considerably throughout the day."

Edwards warned residents who had evacuated that they should not yet return home. "Many of the life-supporting infrastructure elements are not present, they're not operating right now," the governor warned on Tuesday. "So if you have already evacuated, do not return here or elsewhere in southeast Louisiana until the Office of Emergency Preparedness tells you it's ready to receive you."

Rescues have been underway throughout Louisiana for over a day, with some crews working as the storm still battered the state. Hundreds of people have been rescued, but with the widespread outage of power and cell phone service, it is not yet clear how many residents might still be trapped by flooding or debris.

Some areas also face water system failures. Edwards said 18 water systems were out, impacting more than 312,000 residents, and an additional 14 systems were under boil water advisories, affecting another 329,000 people.

Ida's torrential rainfall has totaled more than a foot in some areas in Mississippi and caused the collapse of a highway in George County, which caused two deaths late Monday. According to George County Emergency Management Director John Glass, seven vehicles had to be pulled from the collapsed roadway using cranes, and 10 injuries were reported. Glass said heavy rain from Ida reduced drivers' visibility, preventing them from knowing that they were driving into the washed-out highway.

The storm remains a threat for other states across the Eastern United States. Despite weakening to a tropical depression, Ida continues to bring heavy rain and the threat of flash floods to Tennessee, which saw deadly flooding just a week ago. Heavy flooding in Manchester, Tennessee led organizers to cancel the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, which was set to open Thursday with tens of thousands of fans in attendance despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the system moves to the Northeast, a 1,200-mile (1,931 km) stretch from Louisiana to Massachusetts potentially faces the threat of significant flooding. Nearly 80 million people are under a flash flood threat from the storm. Flooding dangers will be exacerbated as Ida's heavy rains fall on saturated ground already soaked from severe rainstorms throughout August. According to AccuWeather, major cities in the Northeast, such as New York City, Boston and Washington D.C., have already seen more than double their average August rainfall this year.

The National Hurricane Center reported that the center of Ida passed over Nashville, Tennessee Tuesday, with heavy rainfalls stretching over 600 miles (965 km) from the Gulf Coast to Kentucky. Officials state the heaviest rain is located across Kentucky, Alabama and Georgia.

In Pennsylvania, thunderstorms, which could include tornadoes, will arrive Wednesday and could spell disaster for the state's river systems, officials said. River gauge forecasts from the National Weather Service show that the Conemaugh and Juniata rivers could reach a major flooding stage this week. The hilly terrain in the region also brings the potential for road washouts, mudslides and rockslides. Heavy rain is also expected Wednesday in Maryland, with the city of Baltimore providing residents with sandbags on Tuesday.

The scope of the economic loss from the storm remains to be fully accounted for and will likely continue to grow through the end of the week as Ida tracks across the mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. Officials say the storm could disrupt US supply chains and impact the economy, as New Orleans is a major port city on the Mississippi River, and Louisiana is a center of the processing and transportation of gasoline and other petroleum products.



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