

Millions lose power as Hurricane Beryl makes landfall in Texas

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Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Texas early Monday morning between Galveston and Corpus Christi near the small town of Matagorda. The storm had been downgraded to a tropical storm after passing over parts of Yucatan, Mexico but had regained strength in the Gulf to hit Texas as a Category 1 hurricane.

With wind speeds around 80 mph, the first hurricane of the year brought several-foot storm surges over several hundred miles of coastline, reaching up to 6.8 feet in Manchester, Texas. According to PowerOutage.us upwards of 2.6 million lost power as the storm moved over the Houston area and two people were reportedly killed by falling trees. This comes after the storm destroyed communities in the Caribbean, killing at least 11 people, as it became both the earliest Category 4 and Category 5 hurricane in recorded history.

In anticipation of the storm, Acting Governor Dan Patrick issued disaster declarations for 121 counties two days before Beryl made landfall.

Towards the afternoon on Monday, as Beryl moved past Houston, the storm was downgraded to a tropical storm. Forecasters anticipate the storm system will move northeast through Texas into Arkansas on its way to Ohio and Michigan. Large parts of Arkansas, Missouri and Illinois are under flood advisories in anticipation of the storm, covering roughly 14 million people. Remnants of the weakening hurricane are expected to then pass over the Great Lakes, Ontario and Quebec before moving out into the Atlantic.

Though the storm had weakened it continued to spark flash flood warnings in Texas and Louisiana and tornado watches across much of Eastern Texas, Western Louisiana and Southern Arkansas.

The path of Beryl is very similar to Hurricane Harvey in 2017, which also formed east of the Caribbean

Islands and made its way to the Texas coast near Corpus Christi. Harvey was a Category 4 hurricane when it made landfall, causing more than 100 deaths and \$125 billion in damage.

Beryl was small compared to Harvey but it is still a shot across the bow for residents of Texas, who have suffered under repeated infrastructure failures over the past several years.

In May, a Derecho wind storm brought winds of up to 100 mph to the Houston area, killing eight people and cutting power to a million, further exposing the area's vulnerability to extreme weather events. In 2017 Hurricane Harvey caused extensive power outages and flooding, displacing 30,000 people, and winter storms in 2021 caused power outages for millions of people in freezing temperatures that killed 246 people.

Since then the Texas state government has pledged to address the power grid vulnerabilities but has done nothing to address the catastrophic issues with the system.

While Beryl had weakened considerably by the time it reached Texas it is a sign of what a warming world under the impact of capitalist-induced climate change has in store for the Southeastern US, Caribbean, and Central America.

Beryl, a record breaking storm that reached wind speeds of 165 mph at its peak and is one of the fastest forming severe hurricanes in history, was made possible by unseasonably warm ocean temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Sea temperatures in the Caribbean are already in the mid to high 80 degrees Fahrenheit (~30 Celsius), temperatures that are not usually seen until August and September, the height of hurricane season in the Atlantic.

This year is expected to be the most active hurricane season in recorded history, with researchers at Colorado

State University issuing their most aggressive prediction for named storms ever at 23, including 11 hurricanes, five of which are anticipated to be major hurricanes.

The strength of this year's hurricane season is partially fueled by the expected transition to a La Niña, the cooling cycle in the Pacific Ocean that creates enhanced atmospheric conditions for hurricanes in the Atlantic. La Niña years are known to have more active hurricane seasons while its warmer twin El Niño dampens the conditions for hurricane formation.

But the El Niño cycle cannot fully explain the strength of this year's hurricane season. The World Meteorological Organization published a report Monday noting that the past 12 months have all been the hottest in recorded history, all reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages. Ocean temperatures during June averaged 20.85 degrees Celsius between 60°N and 60°S, the highest average for that month recorded.

The United Nations warns that prolonged warming above 1.5°C will have catastrophic effects on the world's environment, "such as breakdowns of major ocean circulation systems, abrupt thawing of boreal permafrost, and collapse of tropical coral reef systems—with abrupt, irreversible, and dangerous impacts for humanity."

The Earth is rapidly approaching this long-term warming tipping point, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that even if current climate goals are reached the Earth could warm by 3.2°C or more.

The effect of climate change on major weather events has led scientists to propose creating a Category 6 hurricane level. A Category 5 is categorized as wind speed of 157 mph or more. After several storms around the world in the past decade reached over 190 mph, calls for a new Category 6 at 192 mph+ to account for these extreme events are mounting.

As severe hurricanes become more common, existing infrastructure—already decaying under capitalist neglect—is being stressed beyond its breaking point. Particularly in Texas, recent storm events have shown the weakness of the state's infrastructure in the face of large storms. Texas' electric power grid is heavily deregulated and isolated from the rest of the country as a way of avoiding federal regulations over interstate

power utilities. This isolation protects the profit interests of the state's energy sector but makes the entire system highly vulnerable to large-scale power outages.

As severe weather events become stronger and more common, millions of people will have their lives put at risk as essential infrastructure falters under pressure.



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