

Multiple fatalities reported as Hurricane Milton makes landfall in west Florida

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9 October 2024

Hurricane Milton continued to increase in size and speed on its approach to Florida's west coast on Wednesday afternoon while it was downgraded to a Category 3 storm, bringing tropical storm force winds of 120 miles per hour, flood levels of rain, and tornadoes to the state.

A National Hurricane Center (NHC) report at 5:00 p.m. said that the winds from Milton extended out 255 miles, with the storm doubling in size in the previous 24 hours. The powerful storm made landfall around 8:30 p.m. near Siesta Key, a low-lying barrier island south of Sarasota.

As of midnight, over 2 million customers in Florida are estimated to have lost power, including nearly 750,000 in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, home to St. Petersburg and Tampa, respectively.

The NHC projected the storm to maintain hurricane strength as it plowed across the state in a northeastern direction toward Orlando on Thursday morning.

The NHC warned that the combination of storm surge and high tide will intensify the inundation of coastal areas, including 10 to 15 feet in the zone of the eyewall, a towering ring of the most severe weather and highest winds of the hurricane where it comes ashore.

The National Weather Service (NWS) issued an extreme wind warning for the Tampa Bay area, the highest-level hurricane wind alert. Austen Flannery, a forecaster with the NWS in Tampa, said, "Historic, catastrophic, life-threatening—all those words summarize the situation."

A tornado watch was in effect for much of the Florida peninsula on Wednesday. As of 6:00 p.m., 18 tornadoes had been reported and more than 54 tornado warnings had been issued across Florida, the most ever in the state, according to the NWS.

Several tornadoes were spawned on Florida's east

coast, forcing fleeing vehicles to turn around or flee. On Wednesday evening, Saint Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson confirmed that there were multiple fatalities in the county:

We have lost some life, search and rescue teams are on their way, our deputies are out here, the fire district is out here, we're going through the rubble and trying to recover anybody we can and provide whatever help that we can.

Local 10 News reported that Pearson confirmed the deaths are located in the Spanish Lakes Community, a retirement community home to over 10,000 adults 55+.

The NWS warned that isolated hail up to 0.5 inches in size was possible, along with isolated gusts of wind up to 70 miles per hour. NWS said 12.6 million Florida residents face potential exposure to the tornadoes, in addition to 2,424 schools and 170 hospitals.

Mandatory evacuation orders have been issued across 15 Florida counties covering a total population of about 7.2 million people. Even though the state and federal governments have no organized plan for this many people to leave the area, officials are telling anyone who stays behind they must fend for themselves and that no first responders will be rescuing anyone at the height of the storm.

On Monday, Jane Castor, the mayor of Tampa, told CNN, "I can say this without any dramatization whatsoever. If you choose to stay in one of those evacuation areas, you are going to die."

Local, state and federal government officials have literally abandoned the population to the destructive wind and flooding of what is being referred to as a

“monster hurricane.”

Preoccupied with billionaire wealth accumulation and war, the Democrats and Republicans have ignored the warnings of climate scientists about the need for protective measures and disaster planning for increasingly intense weather events driven by capitalist-induced global warming.

Residents attempting to leave the storm zone in their cars have faced gridlock and gasoline shortages. Media reports said the northbound lanes of Interstate 75—which runs west from Fort Lauderdale to Naples before heading north through Tampa and into Georgia—were jammed up on Monday and Tuesday. Congestion on the interstate and other major roads continued to hamper evacuation efforts Tuesday afternoon.

Reuters reported that Kinder Morgan, which operates the Central Florida Pipeline system, had shut down the transport of refined petroleum products between Tampa and Orlando and closed all fuel delivery terminals in Tampa due to the winds.

The report said, “Milton could potentially be the biggest disruptor to Florida’s gasoline supply since Hurricane Andrew in 1992, said Tom Kloza, head of energy analysis at Oil Price Information Service.” Kloza also said the Tampa Bay area would be plagued with lingering problems if the storm hits the fuel infrastructure.

Exposing the criminal negligence of government officials in refusing to be prepared for an organized emergency evacuation of the public from the hurricane zone, there are many residents who simply do not have the means to travel out of the area.

Carson MacPherson-Krutsky, a research associate at the Natural Hazards Center at Colorado University-Boulder, told *CU Boulder Today* that not everyone is willing to leave their homes behind, and not everyone has the resources to evacuate.

MacPherson-Krutsky said, “There are many factors that influence people’s decisions. Evacuating is a privilege, and a lot of people don’t have that privilege.” She also said many people lack transportation resources, time or social support to evacuate.

MacPherson-Krutsky indicted the government for a lack of planning for different sections of the population, for example, people with pets, disabilities or

transportation issues, saying that authorities and agencies fail to plan specifically for people with special needs and create barriers for them to access storm shelters or evacuate.

Meanwhile, homeowners who will lose everything in the storm are facing abandonment by insurance companies that are exiting the Florida market or are paying out of pocket to cover damage because insurance rates have increased to unaffordable levels.

Analysts estimate the storm may cause \$60 billion to \$100 billion in insured losses, on par with Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the costliest catastrophe in US history, which caused \$100 billion in insured losses and killed nearly 1,400 people.



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