

My Experience of Hurricane Harvey...



Mu Tianhong, SUNY at Albany

Hurricane Harvey was Coming...

In the year of 2017, I was working on Houston, TX. A forecast of hurricane was issued couple of days before its landfall. People were told to stay at home instead of go to school or work.

Many people went to supermarkets to buy bottle water, can food, then the stores were emptied. Some people also sealed the windows of their home by wood boards. At that time, I could not understand why people did that, because I thought it should be OK in couple of days.

The rain started on noon, Aug. 25. At night, it was windy and lightning. I could hear creaks from the house.



Figure 1. Shoppers pass empty shelves along the bottled water aisle in a Houston grocery

* By Michael Giberson/Contributor and Halea Walker/Contributor

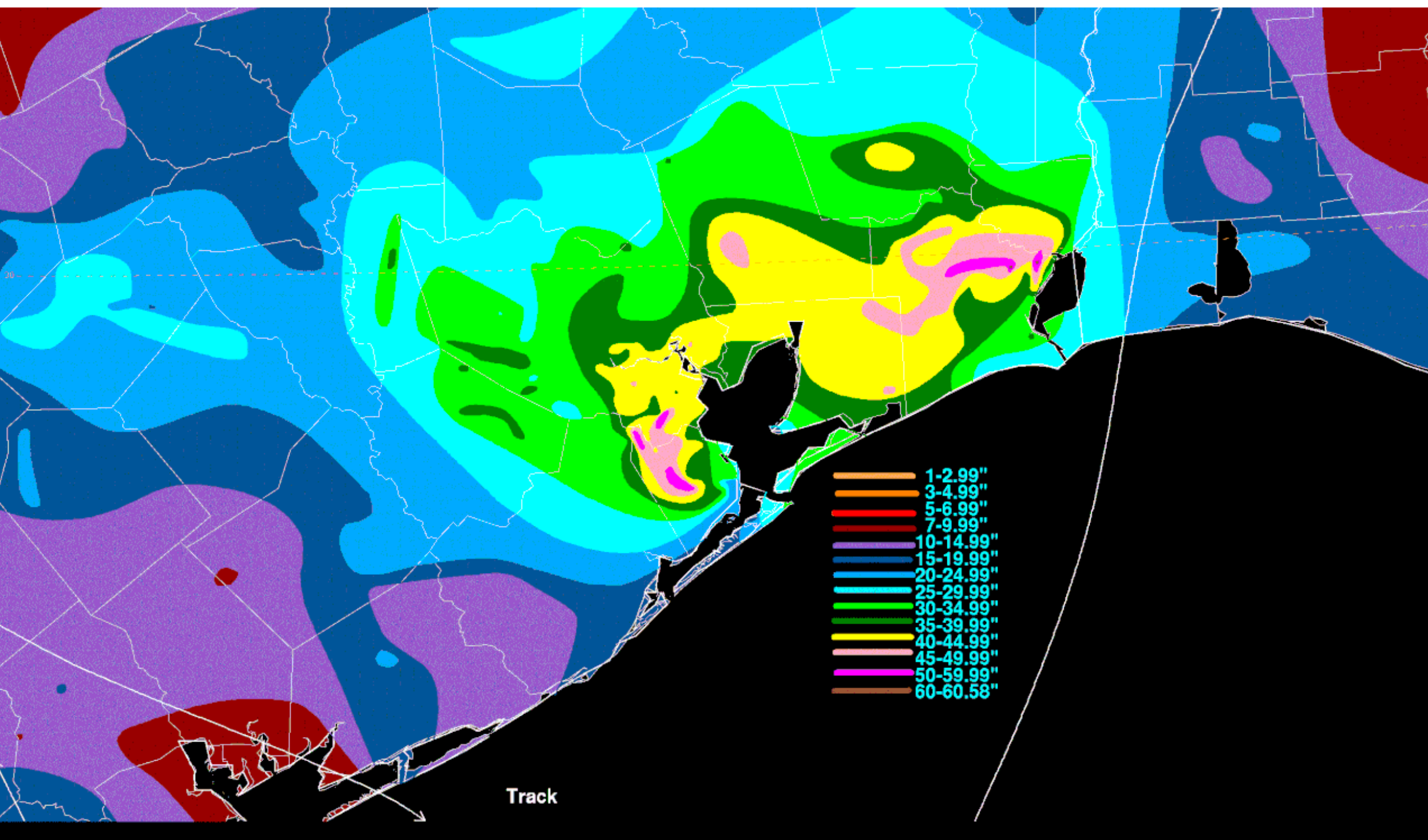


Figure 2. Map of rainfall from the hurricane in the Houston and Beaumont metropolitan areas in southeast Texas

* By David M. Roth; NOAA WPC

At that time, my home was located on central southwest of Houston, where did not submerge by flood. But many people were not as lucky as me. Two friends of mine were living on Missouri City, where was ordered an evacuation.

People in Flood...

My friend Yi and her boyfriend Alex, as well as her relatives were living on Missouri City, TX. When the evacuation was ordered, they tried to leave there by Alex's pick-up truck. Unfortunately, it was too late, all the roads were submerged by flood even a pick-up truck can not go through. They also tried to call 911 to ask for help, but assistance was not available since too many people called in to seek help. Finally, they decided to stay at home. Yi's house has two floors, so they all stayed on the 2nd floor.

Whenever talking about this experience, Yi always remember that the flood approached to her house just in front of the door.

Comparing with waiting for help from the government, many people choose to help themselves as well as their neighbors. They took the boats out of the garages then boating on the community to rescue the people who be trapped in the house. Normally, they are individual boatmen, jet-skiers, or enthusiasts of other water sports. In the flood disaster, they are heroes who save lives.

Though my home was not in the flood, I also achieved some help from others. That was the third day after hurricane Harvey landfall, I tried to pick up a package from a locker about 19 miles away from home. It was all fine when I head to the locker, but when on the way back, I found the highway entrance was submerged under water, so I need to use the next entrance. When driving to the next highway entrance, a section of local road was submerged by flood. A man passing by found my embarrassment and let me driving after him. Then I arrived the next highway entrance successfully.



People are rescued from floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey on an air boat in Dickinson, Texas

*Rick Wilking / Reuters

Painful...



Figure 3. Smokes rises from Arkema Plant in Crosby, TX

*Frank Bajak, Reese Dunklin, and Emily Schmall, Associated Press / KTRP

Secondary Disaster: Arkema was a chemical plant located on Crosby, 20 miles away from Houston, TX. Harvey's floodwater engulfed the backup generator at the plant and stopped the refrigeration which keep the chemicals stable. On Aug. 31, 2017, an explosion happened. Noxious toxins including heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, dioxins and semi-volatile organic compounds were released to the environment.

My roommate Amy was a teacher of public middle school, and she said a student on her class lost parents due to the flood.

My colleague Jeff's house was affected by the flood. It took him several weeks to cleanup inside of the house and more time to clean up the yard.

Now 2 years have passed, life goes on. However, something can be recovered, something can never be recovered.



Figure 4. Downtown Houston is seen behind the flooded Buffalo Bayou

*Paul Jordan Anderson/DoubleHorn Photography