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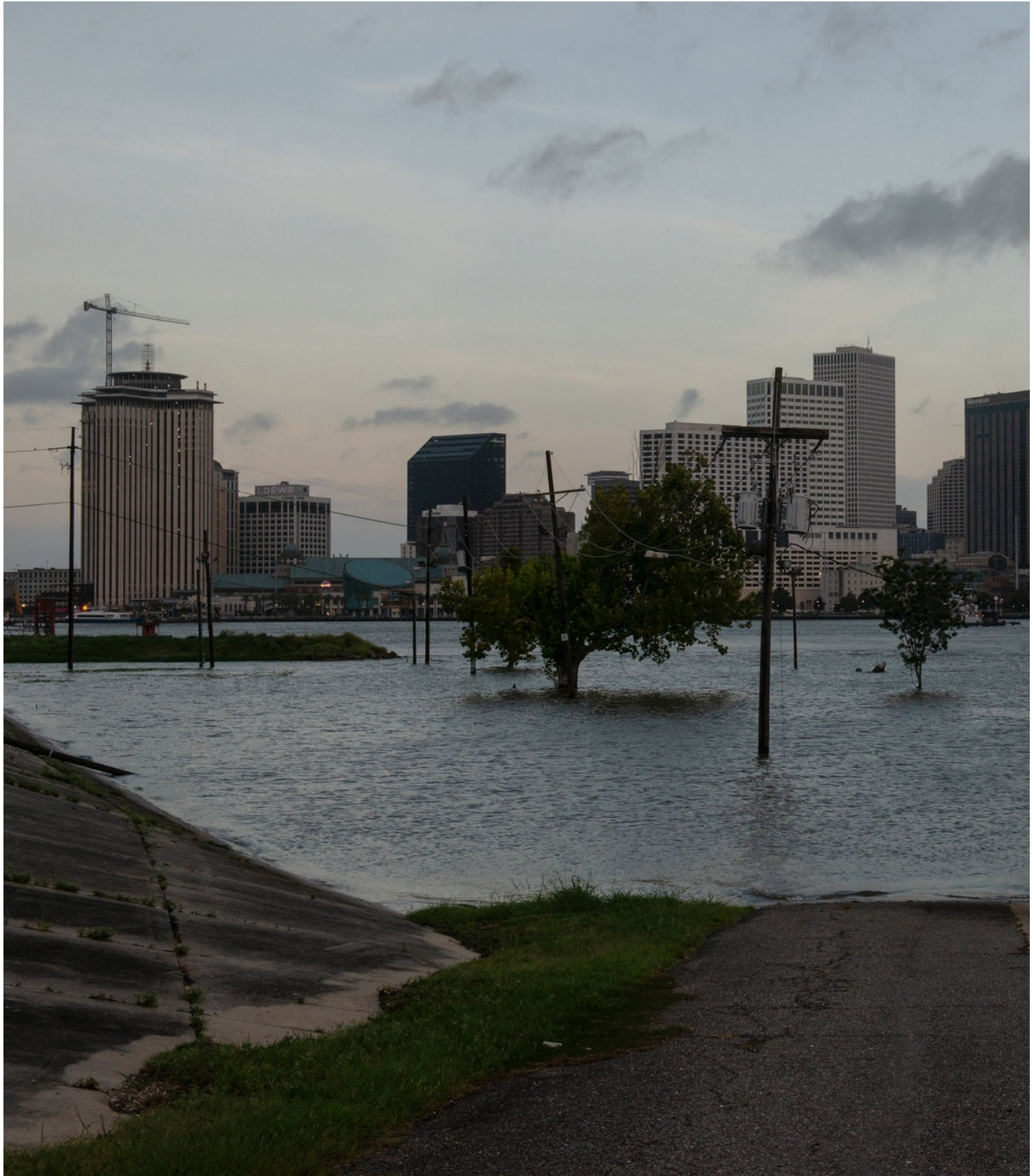
Tropical Storm Barry: Live Updates as It Approaches Louisiana

The storm, which is expected to become a hurricane before it crosses land, could drench parts of the state with up to 20 inches of water.

RIGHT NOW Tropical Storm Barry is about 40 miles off Louisiana's coast and slowly churning toward its expected landfall on Saturday morning.

Here's what you need to know:

- [The storm is gathering strength in the warm water of the Gulf.](#)
- [Barry will test New Orleans's storm protections.](#)
- [Morgan City, surrounded by water, is right in the storm's path.](#)
- [People in the New Orleans area hunkering down, but making a Plan B, too.](#)
- [Volunteers pitched in to make sandbags, and soon ran out.](#)



The swollen Mississippi River in the Algiers Point neighborhood of New Orleans on Friday.
Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

The storm is gathering strength in the warm water of the Gulf.

With only hours to go before Tropical Storm Barry was expected to strengthen into a hurricane and cross the Louisiana coastline, residents were filling sandbags and stocking up on food and gas on Friday to hunker down for a storm that could drench them with up to 20 inches of rain.

Officials on the ground were most worried about dangerous surges of water and the high chance of flash flooding. They were less concerned about wind speeds; on Friday, the storm's winds hit 65 miles per hour, still about 10 m.p.h. shy of a Category 1 hurricane.

With the Mississippi River at 16.2 feet above sea level, the authorities said that for the first time they had shut all the river floodgates ringing most of New Orleans and the neighboring St. Bernard Parish. Before the arrival of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Mississippi was two feet above sea level.

“This is the first time in history a hurricane will strike Louisiana while the Mississippi River is in flood stage,” Gov. John Bel Edwards said Friday, adding that he expected widespread power losses and some search-and-rescue missions. A “huge portion of southern Louisiana” was at risk, he said.

As of 4 p.m. Central time, the hurricane was about 70 miles from Morgan City, and a hurricane warning was in effect for a wide swath of the Louisiana coast, stretching from south of Lafayette to the coast south of New Orleans.

Barry will test New Orleans's storm protections.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell of New Orleans said she would not impose a curfew, but asked residents to “stay off the street” after 8 p.m. Friday.

Heavy rain is expected to be falling by then, and over the coming days the rainfall could be among the biggest tests to the city's complex pump-and-levee protection system since Hurricane Katrina.

The flood-prone city, dipping largely below sea level, relies on dozens of massive drainage pumps to flush water out of its streets and miles of federal levees to block storm surge from the Mississippi River to the south and Lake Pontchartrain to the north. But the aging pumps have proved vulnerable to break downs and power losses in recent years, while spring flooding has pushed the river higher over the last several months to nearly the top of the levees.

[Read about how hurricanes are getting wetter as the climate changes.]

Forecasters expect Barry, the year's first major tropical stirring, to bring between 10 and 20 inches of rain to the New Orleans metropolitan area and several feet of surge in the surrounding waterways. Barry's trajectory, just to the west of New Orleans, will most likely leave the city on the storm's eastern flank, where rains tend to fall heaviest during tropical weather events.



New Orleans relies on dozens of massive drainage pumps, such as the 17th Street Canal Pumping Station, to flush water out of its streets and miles of federal levees to block storm surge.

Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

While the trauma of the levee failures from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 remains thick, New Orleans government officials are eying the rain as the greatest threat to safety and focusing on the performance of the drainage pumps.

Ghassan Korban, the executive director for New Orleans's Sewerage & Water Board, which runs the pumps, cautioned on Thursday that the city “could have a repeat” of widespread flooding seen in the city on Wednesday, when a strong storm dumped up to nine inches of rain in some neighborhoods.

“We have antiquated and old equipment that, again, stand to serve the city,” Mr. Korban said. “They are fragile.”

Morgan City, surrounded by water, is right in the storm's path.

Morgan City's motto is "Right in the Middle of Everywhere." On Saturday morning, the Louisiana city of 12,000 people may find itself right in the middle of a hurricane.

Forecasters expect Barry to land right on the city, which has had many close calls in recent years but not a direct hit. Residents and business owners are already filling sandbags, gassing up generators and gathering food and water supplies.

"We've been dodging the bullet for the last 10 years," Mayor Frank Grizzaffi said in an interview Thursday. "Every time a hurricane comes up, it's somewhere near Morgan City. This time, I think we're finally going to get it."

Mr. Grizzaffi called for a voluntary evacuation that went into effect at noon Friday, a measure that he said was intended primarily to offer those who did not want to remain trapped in their homes during the brunt of the storm the option of seeking drier ground.

At the same time, however, he acknowledged that many may choose to sit it out.

"I believe more people will stick it out than leave," he said Friday. "That's just human nature."

[Read more about storm preparation in Morgan City here.]

People in the New Orleans area hunkering down, but making a Plan B, too.

Just before 10 a.m., a steady stream of cars and trucks pulled into a Costco gas station near the Hollygrove neighborhood of New Orleans, between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain.

The Rev. Elvin Bazile, 82, filled his pickup truck and also a red gas can in the truckbed to power a generator for his home in neighboring Jefferson Parish. He said he pumped enough gas to drive out of town in case of a last-minute evacuation order. The plan is to stay, he said, “unless it gets too bad.” His family has friends in Georgia who are ready to take them in if needed, he said.

“My gut feeling is uncertainty,” Mr. Bazile said about how damaging Barry could be for the New Orleans area. His worry stemmed from both the strength of the storm, he said, as well as the ability of the infrastructure to protect the metro area.

About 3,000 members of the National Guard are being deployed to Louisiana, and 2,600 have already arrived, officials said. About 1,100 of those will be stationed in New Orleans.

On Lakeshore Drive, the curving roadway that edges Lake Pontchartrain, white-capped waves crashed completely over a large concrete embankment, usually a dry area used for jogging and impromptu picnic lunches.



Waves from Lake Pontchartrain crashed along Lakeshore Drive on Friday.

Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

Waves crashed on the bare feet of Joseph Thomas, 51, and his 2-year-old son, Joseph III, on his hip. Mr. Thomas said he planned to ride out the storm at his home in Harvey, a city in Jefferson Parish, unless “it gets ridiculous.”

His main concern, he said, is whether the levees hold up.

“We would not be talking about Katrina had the levees not broke,” he said, explaining that it was the failure of the flood protection structure, not the strength of the storm, that wreaked havoc 14 summers ago.

The family had already stocked up with canned ravioli, Gatorade and “water for days,” Mr. Thomas said. They, too, had a backup plan: In the case of an evacuation order or a lengthy loss of power, they would head to Mr. Thomas’s father’s home north of Hattiesburg, Miss.

Volunteers pitched in to make sandbags, and soon ran out.

About a dozen people stood in line outside a baseball field tucked in a mostly residential part of New Orleans, as a handful of volunteers shoveled sand into bags before handing them to neighbors and strangers on Friday.

The volunteer sandbag operation came together when Ben Markey, the owner of the Mid City Yacht Club, a bar across the street from the ballpark, picked up the bags. Then a friend of his who owns a logistics company dumped a load of sand near the batting area.

They started handing out sandbags about 7:30 a.m., said Mr. Markey, 43.

Social media and local news reports soon spread the word, and about three hours and 200 sandbags later, they’d run out.

Patrick Staunton, a neighbor, was among those shoveling. “I feel guilty we don’t have more,” he said.

The Mid City Yacht Club, which got its name because boats were tied up to the baseball field's fence and abandoned there in the days after Katrina, plans to stay open during the storm.

The business hasn't flooded since Katrina, but Mr. Markey said he was taking precautions: The bar has a generator, and a couple of sandbags of its own as a last line of defense.

New Orleans, which usually hands out sandbags during severe tropical weather, is not doing so for Barry, Ms. Cantrell said Friday. The city is concerned about sand clogging storm drains, but the mayor said residents can use sandbags if they already have them, or buy them at suppliers like Home Depot, so long as they remove the bags after the storm passes.

But volunteer sandbag operations still popped up, including in Algiers, the sliver of New Orleans located across the Mississippi River. The Algiers Point Association, which represents the historic neighborhood at a sharp bend of the Mississippi, promised two to three bags per home or business, free of charge.

Here's how the pumping system works.

Mr. Korban of the Sewerage & Water Board said that 118 of New Orleans's total 120 pumps should be working. The pumps draw water from miles of underground pipes and curbside storm drains, and deposit it into canals that flow into Lake Pontchartrain.

Officials frequently stress ahead of storms that heavy rain can overwhelm the capacity of the city's drainage system, regardless of how well the old pumps perform.

Maintenance workers pumped out water on Canal Street Friday in New Orleans.

Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

The pumps also depend partly on power generated by the city's local power provider, Entergy New Orleans, which often goes down during strong storms because of lightning outages or damaged power lines.

"Again, we cannot pump our way out of the water levels and the water falls that are expected to hit the city of New Orleans," Mayor Cantrell of New Orleans said on Thursday. "We need you to understand this, and again be prepared to shelter in place."

The Sewerage & Water Board's pumps suffered major setbacks in the summer of 2017, when a slow-moving deluge flooded much of the city and revealed that more than a dozen drainage pumps and several key power turbines were knocked offline.

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Officials then spent around \$85 million to repair those pumps and turbines, and have routinely stressed that the water utility's shaky drainage equipment is in better shape than it has been for decades.

Aside from rain, officials with the Army Corps of Engineers were closely watching how high Barry's storm surge was pushing up the Mississippi River along New Orleans. As of Friday morning, the river level stood at just above 16 feet, close to the low point of 20 feet for some stretches of the New Orleans-area federal levees built and maintained by the Army Corps.

Ricky Boyett, a Corps spokesman, said on Friday that the river so far is not projected to rise higher than 19 feet, and that officials do not anticipate any overtopping.

"We do have a lot of confidence," Mr. Boyett said. "The Mississippi River levees are very robust. They're designed to handle this type of water and pressure."

A near-total transportation shutdown will be in place by Friday night.

Some flights were canceled on Friday at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, according to the city's aviation director, Kevin Dolliole, and airlines have also begun waiving fees to change travel plans for flights involving New Orleans.

Amtrak trains and Greyhound buses have been halted at the city's Union Passenger Terminal. All public buses, streetcars and ferries over the Mississippi River will be suspended at 8 p.m., the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority announced.

The Coast Guard plans to close the New Orleans stretch of the Mississippi River later on Friday.

Beau Evans and Emily Lane reported from New Orleans, David Montgomery from Morgan City, La., and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs and Adeel Hassan from New York.

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