16 dead as Florence inundates Carolinas

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WILMINGTON, North Carolina — Catastrophic flooding from Florence spread across the Carolinas on Sunday, with roads to Wilmington cut off by the epic deluge and muddy river water swamping entire neighborhoods miles inland. "The risk to life is rising with the angry waters," Governor Roy Cooper declared as the storm's death toll climbed to 16.  
The storm continued to crawl westward, dumping more than 30 inches of rain in spots since Friday, and fears of historic flooding grew. Tens of thousands were ordered evacuated from communities along the state's steadily rising rivers — with the Cape Fear, Little River, Lumber, Waccamaw and Pee Dee rivers all projected to burst their banks.  
In Wilmington, with roads leading in and out of the city underwater and streams still swelling upward, residents waited for hours outside stores and restaurants for basic necessities like water. Police guarded the door of one store, and only 10 people were allowed inside at a time.  
Woody White, chairman of the board of commissioners of New Hanover County, said officials were planning for food and water to be flown into the coastal city of nearly 120,000 people.  
"Our roads are flooded," he said. "There is no access to Wilmington."  
About 70 miles (115 kilometers) away from the coast, residents near the Lumber River stepped from their homes directly into boats floating in their front yards; river forecasts showed the scene could be repeated in towns as far as 250 miles inland as waters rise for days.  
Downgraded overnight to a tropical depression, Florence was still massive. But with radar showing parts of the storm over six Southeastern states and flood worries spreading into southern Virginia and West Virginia, North and South Carolina were still in the bull's-eye.  
Half way around the world, meanwhile, Typhoon Mangkhut barreled into southern China on Sunday after lashing the Philippines with strong winds and heavy rain that left dozens dead. More than 2.4 million people were evacuated from China's southern Guangdong province ahead of the massive typhoon, the strongest to hit the region in nearly two decades.  
In North Carolina, fears of what could be the worst flooding in the state's history led officials to order tens of thousands to evacuate, though it wasn't clear how many had fled or even could. The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Brock Long, said officials were focused on finding people and rescuing them.  
"We'll get through this. It'll be ugly, but we'll get through it," Long told NBC's "Meet The Press."  
President Donald Trump said federal emergency workers, first responders and law enforcement officials were "working really hard." As the storm "begins to finally recede, they will kick into an even higher gear. Very Professional!" he declared in a tweet.  
The storm's death toll climbed to 16 when a pickup truck ran into standing water in South Carolina and the driver lost control, hitting a tree, authorities said. Two other people also died in storm-related wrecks, and two more people died from inhaling carbon monoxide from a generator in their home.  
Victor Merlos was overjoyed to find a store open for business in Wilmington since he had about 20 relatives staying at his apartment, which still had power. He spent more than $500 on cereal, eggs, soft drinks and other necessities, plus beer.  
"I have everything I need for my whole family," said Merlos. Nearby, a Waffle House restaurant limited breakfast customers to one biscuit and one drink, all take-out, with the price of $2 per item.  
Kenneth Campbell had donned waterproof waders intending to check out his home in Lumberton, but he didn't bother when he saw the Coast Guard and murky waters in his neighborhood.  
"I'm not going to waste my time. I already know," he said.  
As rivers swelled, state regulators and environmental groups were monitoring the threat from gigantic hog and poultry farms located in low-lying, flood-prone areas.  
The industrial-scale farms contain vast pits of animal feces and urine that can pose a significant pollution threat if they are breached or inundated by floodwaters. In past hurricanes, flooding at dozens of farms also left hundreds of thousands of dead hogs, chickens and other decomposing livestock bobbing in floodwaters.  
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