

U.S.

Harvey Weakens, Sparing Louisiana the Worst

No fatalities or injuries reported in state as storm heads north; Texas evacuees cross border for shelter



Flood waters from Tropical Storm Harvey surround a power substation in Iowa, Calcasieu Parish, La., on Tuesday. PHOTO: JONATHAN BACHMAN/REUTERS

By Quint Forgey

Updated Aug. 30, 2017 3:20 pm ET

BATON ROUGE, La.—Louisiana officials and residents breathed a sigh of relief after a weakening Tropical Storm Harvey left the state largely unscathed after landfall early Wednesday morning.

“Obviously, things are not as bad as has been forecasted. We’re very thankful for that,” said Gov. John Bel Edwards. “We’ve fared much better than we feared might be the case.”

Harvey touched down at roughly 4 a.m. in the southwestern corner of Louisiana near the town of Cameron, roughly 50 miles from the Texas border, bringing maximum sustained winds of 45 mph and gusts of up to 60 mph along the coastline.

No fatalities or injuries have been reported in Louisiana, where the storm is losing force.

Before hitting Louisiana, Harvey pounded Texas, where 19 storm-related deaths were reported and 230 shelters were housing at least 30,000 people. An accurate death toll is uncertain because Texas officials aren't releasing statewide figures.

The far western reaches of Louisiana already had experienced up to 30 inches of rainfall over the previous several days and were the most heavy-hit by Wednesday's landfall, which brought more rain and accelerated flooding.

Harvey also packed a several-foot storm surge across the coastal areas of the state and a spate of tornadoes that blazed through fields and forested areas.

"It has been weakening," said Andy Tingler, a National Weather Service meteorologist based out of Lake Charles, La. "It is expected to drop below tropical storm force winds later this afternoon."

The state's two largest cities escaped the worst of the storm after enduring 2 to 4 inches of rainfall Tuesday. Baton Rouge and New Orleans were preparing for similar downpours totaling up to 8 inches Wednesday, but were visited only by bands of showers that brought less than an inch of rainfall to the metropolitan areas.

"New Orleans did not receive the brunt of this event," said Alek Krautmann, a National Weather Service meteorologist based out of Slidell, La. "For the most part, all impacts have been further west."

Louisiana officials will now turn much of their attention to helping evacuees from Beaumont, Orange and other cities in southeastern Texas that have been hammered by torrential rain.

Roughly 160 people found shelter last night in Lake Charles, and that number grew to more than 300 Wednesday. It was expected to increase further tonight as Texans flee the flooded city of Port Arthur. The state of Louisiana has also offered additional shelter to as many as 3,400 Texas residents in Shreveport.

Harvey will now continue inland to the north, traversing the state diagonally. The center of the storm is expected to pass over central Louisiana early Wednesday evening and make its way to the northeast region of the state Wednesday night or Thursday morning.

"Residents of Louisiana are still not out of harm's way," said Bill Doran, a federal coordinating officer with Federal Emergency Management Agency, noting the possibility of flash floods and power outages.

The National Guard is working to make a temporary repair on a breached levee in Gueydan, and 38 parishes have closed their schools. There remains standing water on hundreds of roadways.

Gene Reynolds, a retired educator and state representative, said he has been in near-constant contact with friends and loved ones in southwest Louisiana, where he worked as principal at Johnson Bayou High School.

Mr. Reynolds said he and a group of five or six friends will head down to his boarded up beach house in Cameron Parish to help locals gut damaged houses and tear down moldy drywall.

“Anytime there’s something in the gulf, people get antsy because you know in the back of your mind what can happen,” he said. “This is a sigh of relief.... We plan for the worst and hope for the best.”

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