

U.S.

# Hurricane Harvey Threatens South Texas Coast

Storm is supposed to make landfall late Friday or early Saturday, could bring up to 35 inches of rain

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Floodwaters from Tropical Storm Harvey surround homes and businesses in Port Arthur, Texas, on Thursday. GERALD HERBERT/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*By Dan Frosch*

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DALLAS—South Texas is bracing for the first hurricane to make landfall in the Lone Star State since Hurricane Ike careened into the Gulf Coast in 2008.

Hurricane Harvey was upgraded Thursday from a tropical storm by the National Weather Service, as it quickly gathered strength during the past 12 hours while moving across the Gulf of Mexico. The storm is supposed to reach the Texas coast sometime on Friday or Saturday.

Forecasters have warned that the storm could cause widespread flooding across Texas' coastal cities, and drench parts of the region with up to 35 inches of rain.

Gov. Greg Abbott pre-emptively declared a state of disaster in 30 Texas counties—including heavily populated Harris County, which encompasses Houston—in anticipation of what is expected to be Hurricane Harvey reaching the Gulf Coast.

Mr. Abbott also elevated the state's emergency operations readiness level as the threat from the storm increased.

Mr. Abbott said he spoke with President Donald Trump and the heads of the Homeland Security Department and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

A statement from Mr. Abbott's office said President Trump called him "to offer federal support for the State of Texas...the President pledged all available resources from the federal government to assist in preparation, and rescue and recovery efforts."

At a news conference Thursday, Corpus Christi city officials said that people living in low-lying areas were being strongly encouraged to leave ahead of the storm, noting that voluntary evacuations were currently in place for now.

A mandatory evacuation was ordered Thursday afternoon for residents of Calhoun County, a coastal region north of Corpus Christi.

Other coastal cities up and down the Texas Gulf Coast scrambled to make last-minute preparations.

Corpus Christi was distributing sandbags to residents—20 for each household or business—to safeguard against flooding, and numerous events planned for Friday in the area were being canceled.

"Right now, there are two things that are most concerning," said Eric Berger, meteorologist and editor of Space City Weather, a website that tracks weather in Houston. "Harvey has been rapidly intensifying. And you could conceivably see parts of the coast receive 10 to 20 inches of rain, and that would cause widespread flooding."

Mr. Berger said the path of the storm once it makes landfall is uncertain, noting that South Texas could see several days of heavy rain next week as the storm hangs over the state.

Houston officials said the city “is preparing for significant impacts” from the hurricane—mostly in the form of heavy rains that could swamp the city. City officials warned rain could cause dangerous flash floods. Residents were being urged to have a week’s worth of food and water on hand. The Houston area in particular has been prone to deadly flooding in past years because it is low lying, sees a large amount of rain and has poor drainage.

Houston’s fire department is preparing for water rescues, city officials said, and may barricade intersections that are prone to flooding.

In April 2016, a storm poured more than a foot of rain across the area and left eight people dead. Flooding from that storm also caused widespread damage across Houston.

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