

U.S.

Texas Officials Warn of Still-Deadly Waters, Long-Term Flooding

Gov. Abbott and Houston mayor ask residents to be vigilant about evacuation warnings



Volunteers and students from C.E. King High School in Houston help clean up the school on Friday in the wake of Harvey.
PHOTO: SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

By Jon Kamp

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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott warned Friday that floodwaters in the state remain a potentially deadly hazard, while Houston's mayor said some neighborhoods in the city's west side could remain flooded for weeks, underscoring the continuing strain facing an already weary and waterlogged region.

They spoke as efforts continued to try to restore water service in Beaumont, a flooded city near the coast and Louisiana border, and to deliver aid to the tens of thousands of people displaced by Harvey, which first made landfall a week ago. Many areas remained inaccessible and search and rescue operations were still being carried out.

The death toll from the storm has topped 45, according to local authorities, and the number could continue rising because of other deaths awaiting investigation.

“There still remain areas that are deadly dangerous,” Mr. Abbott said at a news conference.

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He called on residents to be vigilant about evacuations warnings because “this water can rise suddenly.”

More than 42,000 people sought shelter in Red Cross and community shelters in Texas on Thursday night, a Red Cross spokesman said, up from 34,000 the night before. The Federal Emergency

Management Agency has received about 440,000 registrations for assistance, the governor said, the most from a single event.

In Houston, Mayor Sylvester Turner warned that even as some parts of the nation’s fourth-largest city dry out, the Army Corps of Engineers will continue to release water from strained reservoirs for up to 15 days. He urged residents still in nearby homes that already have water in them to evacuate, both for their personal safety and to ease pressure on first responders.



Gov. Greg Abbott delivers a briefing on Harvey at the Texas Department of Public Safety building in Austin on Friday. PHOTO: DREW ANTHONY SMITH/GETTY IMAGES

“We’re having to balance competing interests right now,” the mayor said at a news conference. “If there’s water in your home, that is not going to change, and that’s why I’m making this strong request.”

The Army Corps of Engineers has been steadily releasing water from the 1940s-era reservoirs to protect them after Hurricane Harvey dumped an unprecedented amount of rain in the region.

The potential for long-term flooding is another sign of the long, arduous road ahead. Even in areas of Houston where water has receded, residents and business owners are just starting to

assess, and reckon with, the damage the flooding caused to their property.

The scale of the disaster has required a huge response. FEMA said it has provided nearly two million meals for distribution in Texas along with almost two million liters of water, 4,700 blankets and 1,400 cots. The agency, which has 21,000 federal staff deployed to help, has also provided food and supplies to Louisiana, which Harvey drenched this week after finally leaving Texas behind.

On Friday, President Donald Trump sent lawmakers an initial request for \$7.9 billion toward Harvey relief and recovery efforts, the Associated Press reported, more than the \$5.9 billion he was expected to seek.

The Red Cross has 2,300 disaster workers on the ground and is sending in 700 more, the spokesman said. It is also bringing in a team of Mexican Red Cross specialists to distribute aid and services to Spanish-speaking residents.

Mr. Abbott sought to reassure state residents that gasoline supplies in the state were sufficient and that there is “a bunch of gasoline coming in” through tankers, barges and pipelines.

“The bottom line is the state of Texas will have plenty of gasoline,” he said.

The governor on Friday also announced a “Rebuild Texas Fund” that aims to quickly raise \$100 million to support the recovery effort. Billionaire computer mogul Michael Dell and his wife, Susan, committed \$36 million to the fund, half up front, and started a matching campaign for donations through Labor Day.

Meantime, communities tucked in near the coast and Louisiana border, where Harvey dumped 20 to 30 inches of rain in a 24 hour span before finally leaving the state, were still dealing Friday with swollen rivers and dangerous conditions. The flooding knocked out the water supply in Beaumont, a city of about 118,000, which said Friday that crews were working around the clock to try to get the water service back on.

The Army Corps of Engineers said it is delivering six pumps to the city that can deliver up to 18,000 gallons a minute, in total, to help restore city drinking water.

—Ben Kesling and Russell Gold contributed to this article.

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