

U.S.

Harvey to Hit Flooded Houston Again

Storm brings Texas coastal region to a standstill; 'We know there are more people out there'

By Erin Ailworth, Dan Frosch and Christopher M. Matthews

Updated Aug. 29, 2017 7:07 am ET

HOUSTON—Tropical Storm Harvey continued to pummel Texas, paralyzing greater Houston and testing it on every front as the region braces to take on more water in the coming days.

Desperate rescue efforts were still underway late Monday, even as the city strained to perform basic functions. Mayor Sylvester Turner said Houston Police had rescued more than 3,000 people during the storm, including 1,000 on Monday alone, while the city's fire department said it had received more than 2,300 calls for service since midnight.

The death toll remains unclear. On Monday evening, Mayor Sylvester Turner said three deaths in Houston had occurred during the storm but could not confirm reports that a family of six had died in their vehicle. Authorities said they fear the death toll will rise.

Houston's two major airports, its biggest public school systems, its port and nearly all of its major employers were closed as its freeways and major roads remained nearly unnavigable due to high waters. Nearly all substantial commerce and nonemergency government had ground to a halt.

The city's -system faced unprecedented strains; floods cut off both doctors and patients from hospitals, and forced several hospitals to evacuate.

Roads surrounding Houston's Vintage and Sugar Land hospitals "have eight feet of water," said Michael Covert, senior vice president of Catholic Health Initiatives's Texas operations. "They have become islands of humanity."

MD Anderson, part of the University of Texas and one of the largest and most respected cancer centers in the world, was closed on Monday for all outpatient services, appointments and surgeries, and said those services would remain closed through Tuesday.

From the mansions of the Houston's well-to-do River Oaks neighborhood, to the hipster cafes of the Heights area north of downtown, to the working-class neighborhoods of the city's east end,

the storm's wrath spared virtually no one. That held true across the greater Houston metropolitan area, a nine-county region of more than 6.7 million people spread out over 10,000 square miles, larger than New Jersey.

More than 30 inches of rain had fallen over parts of the area by Monday, inundating homes and requiring rescue attempts for thousands of stranded people to date, as Harvey moved back over the Gulf of Mexico and headed east along the coast, according to the National Hurricane Center.

The historic rains were forcing Houston area officials to make painful decisions to evacuate flooded areas—and to release water from reservoirs under strain, knowing that it would flow into nearby neighborhoods.

Harvey was on track to make landfall again east of Houston late Tuesday or Wednesday. Though it wasn't expected to regain much strength, it was poised to deliver as much as 20 more inches of rain before passing—making the total, 50 inches, the equivalent of a normal year's worth of rain for Houston in one week.

“The reality is the water is continuing to rise,” Mr. Turner said. “The water level along Buffalo Bayou in all likelihood will increase.”

Buffalo Bayou is the main waterway that snakes through the heart of Houston, and the water levels of two reservoirs that feed into it are particularly concerning. The Addicks and Barker reservoirs, built in the 1940s to protect downtown and the Houston Ship Channel downstream, were beyond capacity, prompting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to release water from them strategically and to ask residents nearby to voluntarily evacuate.

Houston's 800-mile web of bayous and creeks continued to swell.

North of Houston, Cypress Creek was among the most flooded, with water pouring into homes across several square miles. That, in turn, was prompting numerous harrowing evacuations, administered for the most part by friends, neighbors and other people in the community.

Kelly Adams, 55 years old, went out on a friend's jet ski Monday morning to save a few former neighbors who were stranded.

“We have to do everything we can,” he said. “We know there are more people out there.”

Near Tidwell Park, a less affluent section of northeast Houston, residents were getting hemmed in by flooding and some here said they had no way out. Half-sunken cars littered the streets and several stores nearby including a Subway sandwich shop and a discount store, appeared to have been looted.

Tracking Harvey's Path

Hurricane Tracker

TRACKING WIND INTENSITY
SPEEDS



Brandi Tillman, waded through waist-high murky flood water to reach her mother, who takes medication for blood pressure and lives in an apartment complex nearly surrounded by several feet of water. Ms. Tillman inched forward, clutching a fence for balance. She couldn't swim, she said, but needed to reach her mom.

"I called the Coast Guard, I called the police, I called the fire department. They haven't done nothing," Ms. Tillman said later as she helped her barefooted mother, Nyoka, through the water, bringing with them a shopping cart loaded with some of her belongings.

On 11th Street, one the Heights neighborhood's main drags, one of the few businesses with its lights still on was family-owned C&D Hardware and Gifts.

"We only close five days out of the year, and this ain't one of them," said store manager Arthur Buchanan, who'd ridden his bike through the

floods to work that day. Mr. Buchanan said that if the water got any higher, he'd bring his shotgun with him, in case any water moccasins and copperheads came by.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Brock Long said Monday that some 30,000 people would be placed in temporary shelters.

"This is a landmark event for Texas," said Mr. Long. He defended local officials' decision not to evacuate Houston ahead of the storm, saying carrying out such an operation in a city of Houston's size—2.3 million people—would have taken days.

Mr. Turner said 4,800 people were staying at the George R. Brown convention center, which was opened as an emergency shelter, and officials there wouldn't turn anyone away.

The U.S. Coast Guard said it had devoted every available resource to responding to the disaster. It was getting upwards of 1,000 calls an hour and had rescued more than 3,000 people on Monday, it said. Its efforts in Houston had been made difficult, it said, because the tropical storm was still raging, unlike Hurricane Katrina where recovery operations unfolded after the storm had ended.

Speaking in Corpus Christi, near where Harvey had initially made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane Friday night, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott warned residents that they faced a long road

Photos: Tropical Storm Harvey Causes Record Flooding in Texas

The tropical storm dumped more than 50 inches of rain in parts of Texas in a new record for the contiguous U.S.



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

1 of 21

ahead to recovery.

“This is a place that Texas and FEMA will be involved in for a long, long time. And we will be here until we can restore this region as back to normal as possible,” Mr. Abbott said. “We need to recognize it is going to be a new normal, a new and different normal for this entire region.”

Harvey is likely to deal a significant blow to Houston’s economy, the nation’s fourth largest city, whose gross domestic product—\$503 billion in 2015, according to the most recent data from the Department of Commerce—is larger than that of Poland, Thailand or Nigeria.

Kevin M. Simmons, a disaster economist at Austin College, estimated that \$145 billion in property is at risk of being damaged. By contrast, Hurricane Katrina is estimated to have cost about \$100 billion in property damage in 2005.

HURRICANE HARVEY RELIEF EFFORTS

To make a financial donation to Hurricane Harvey relief efforts contact these charities:

- The United Way of Greater Houston: Visit www.unitedwayhouston.org/flood or text UWFLOOD to 41444.
 - American Red Cross: Visit www.redcross.org, call 1-800-RED-CROSS or text the word Harvey to 90999 to make a \$10 donation.
 - Salvation Army: Visit www.helpsalvationarmy.org, call 1-800-SAL-ARMY or text STORM to 51555.
-

“I think it’s very likely that it will be worse [than Katrina],” Mr. Simmons said.

More difficult to predict, according to Mr. Simmons, is the longer-term impact on Houston’s economic activity.

Houston boasts one of the largest medical centers in the world, and the healthcare and education services industry were the city’s largest employer as of 2014, according to a 2017 study by the Greater Houston Partnership. Houston and the surrounding region are also in the midst of a petrochemical boom, with more than \$50 billion of capital investment.

President Donald Trump said Monday that the people of Houston were handling Harvey “amazingly well” given the scale of the flooding.

“It is a historic amount of water,” Mr. Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. “It’s going to be a very expensive situation.”

Mr. Trump said he expects Texas to recover fully, and anticipated that “you’re going to see very rapid action from Congress” in the form of disaster relief funds.

— Bradley Olson, Michael C. Bender. Arian Campo-Flores, Ben Kesling, Russell Gold, Melanie Evans and Miguel Bustillo contributed reporting to this article.

Write to Erin Ailworth at Erin.Ailworth@wsj.com, Dan Frosch at dan.frosch@wsj.com and Christopher M. Matthews at christopher.matthews@wsj.com

Appeared in the August 29, 2017, print edition as ‘Historic Floods Submerge Houston.’