

U.S.

Hurricane Harvey Slams Into Texas With Devastating Force

Storm weakens from Category 4 to Category 1 as it lashes state with intense rain and winds of more than 100 miles an hour



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, Erin Ailworth and Russell Gold

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CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas—Hurricane Harvey slammed into Texas Friday night, coming ashore as a powerful Category 4 hurricane and lashing the shore with intense rain and winds of more than 100 miles an hour as it struck land.

The storm is the first substantial hurricane to hit Texas since Hurricane Ike struck the Gulf Coast in 2008; the last Category 4 storm to hit Texas was Hurricane Carla in 1961, according to the National Weather Service.

“This is going to be a very major disaster,” Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Friday.

After gradually weakening over several hours, the National Hurricane Center said that by 5 a.m. Harvey was back to a Category 1 storm, the Associated Press reported.

According to the AP, no deaths were immediately confirmed in the hours after Harvey’s arrival, but officials noted emergency crews couldn’t get out in many places due to high winds.

The hurricane hit between Port Aransas, just outside Corpus Christi, and Port O’Connor, to the north.

The City of Rockport, along the coast near Corpus Christi, appeared to take a direct hit from the hurricane, local officials said late Friday night. Larry Sinclair, a commander with the Rockport Police Department said damage in at least in some parts of city was significant.

Mr. Sinclair said that officers and emergency workers were trying to assess the extent of the damage to buildings and were checking to see whether anyone was trapped inside. But he said wind conditions were making it difficult for emergency workers to evaluate the level of devastation the city and its residents had suffered.

“We were pretty much ground zero,” he said.

Earlier in the day, the mayor of Rockport told a local television station that residents of his coastal city who don’t evacuate should use a marker to write their names and Social Security numbers on their arms.

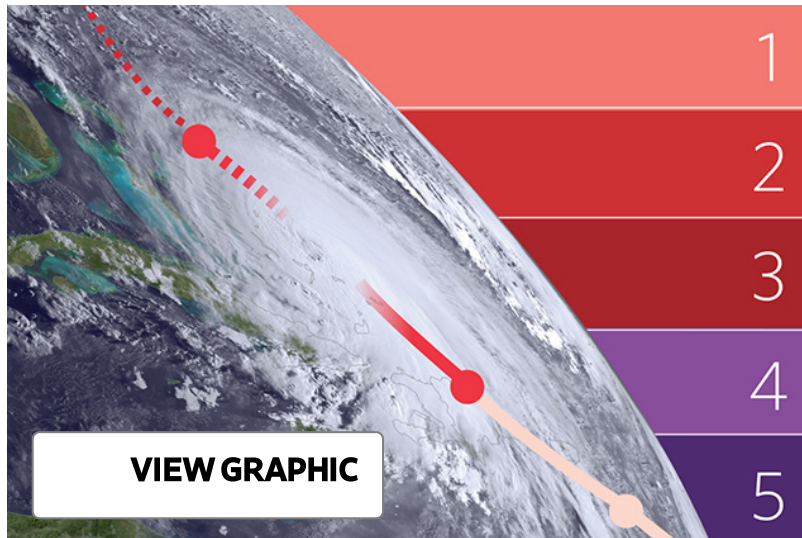
Harvey had picked up strength churning toward the Gulf Coast, and is expected to drench the state with as much as 40 inches of rain in some areas, according to the National Weather Service. The National Hurricane Center warned of “catastrophic flooding” from the storm.

Even before the center of the storm made landfall Friday night, hurricane-force winds were being reported along the coast, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Friday night, 104,000 people had lost power, according to a tweet from a state power-grid operator.

Late Friday, Gov. Abbott said the Federal Emergency Management Agency had granted his request for a presidential disaster declaration in response to Harvey. President Donald Trump also tweeted that he had signed the declaration, making more federal aid available to the state.

Tracking Hurricane Harvey's Wrath



Earlier in the day, thousands of people fled inland, leaving behind deserted coastal communities with boarded-up homes and businesses, and barren grocery stores.

But others stayed behind, prompting fears from local officials as the hurricane grew more powerful.

Major ports were closed, and oil operations along the Texas coast were suspended. There are more than 800 oil platforms in the path

of the storm and more than 100 refineries and terminals on the shore that could be disrupted, according to the consultancy firm Riskpulse.

The U.S. Geological Survey forecast that the storm's power could significantly impact 65% of the state's coastline.

Gov. Abbott said that in addition to strong winds, officials are concerned about flooding caused by the storm hovering over the coastal bend of Texas.

"We are going to be dealing with immense, really record-setting flooding in multiple regions across the state of Texas," Gov. Abbott said. "There will be a tremendous amount of rain dropped on miles upon miles of Texas."

People who hadn't moved away from the coast face the possibility of going a long time without access to basic necessities such as water, power and food, the governor said.

White House officials said President Trump had been briefed on storm preparations, and that he would have access to any staff or resources he might need while spending the weekend at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland.

Mr. Trump intends to visit Texas early next week as part of his response to the hurricane, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said.

From small coastal communities to major ports such as Houston and Corpus Christi, which handled hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cargo last year, emergency officials scrambled Friday to make final preparations before Harvey hit.

Houston officials said the city was preparing for significant effects from the hurricane, mostly in the form of heavy rains that could swamp the city. Police and fire officials started preparing evacuation boats, high-water rescue vehicles and supplies in anticipation. Residents were being urged to have a week's worth of food and water on hand.

Houston has been prone to deadly flooding because it is low lying, sees a large amount of rain and has poor drainage.

Houston officials said Friday that no mass evacuations will be called for the Houston region, despite expectations the area will see a massive amount of rain over the next several days. Officials say flooding is likely, especially as rainfall builds up in the local bayous.

"We want people to be alert, prepared, on guard, stocked up, patient, sheltered, calm and ready," Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said as he urged people to stay off the roads.

In an interview at Houston TranStar, a government emergency operations center where officials are coordinating storm efforts, Mayor Turner said storm surge out of Galveston could also cause problems, as it blocks water from the draining into the Gulf.

Mandatory evacuations were ordered Thursday afternoon for residents of Calhoun and Victoria counties along the coast. By late Thursday night, a steady stream of cars choked highways heading north and inland.

In Brazoria County near Houston, officials had issued a mandatory evacuation order for areas including for Surfside Beach and Treasure Island, a county spokeswoman said.

Charles Wagner, the Brazoria County sheriff, had a blunt warning for residents who disobeyed the orders: "You're on your own until after the storm is over with," he said. "I'm not going to risk the lives of my people to go in there for somebody that voluntarily stayed and then all of a sudden wants to come out."

In Corpus Christi, a city of roughly 325,000, city officials said that people living in low-lying areas were being strongly encouraged to leave, but officials had not issued a mandatory evacuation order.

Mayor Joe McComb defended the city's decision not to order people out, saying he had consulted at length with local officials. He added that many residents had heeded warnings to leave, though he didn't have any estimates on how many had left.

Corpus Christi's shoreline was empty Friday as rain and wind whipped against now boarded-up hotels that line the street, the occasional police car slowly patrolling.

Hurricane Harvey's Progress

Hurricane Tracker

TRACKING

WIND

INTENSITY

SPEEDS



Nearby, residents rushing to a HEB grocery store for last-minute supplies were turned away. The store, like many others here, had shut its doors early.

Jennifer Herrera, 25, who works at the HEB, had decided to wait out the storm with her boyfriend in their apartment, worried that it was too late to get out of town.

She had stocked up on water, canned food and bread. Her mother, sister and niece were planning to come over to stay with them later in the day.

“Everybody else is going elsewhere, but the rain is going to be the same there, too,” she said. “But I’m freaking scared. I’m so scared”

Ms. Herrera, a Corpus Christi native, said she hadn’t seen anything like the frenzied preparations for Harvey and was worried that staying was the wrong decision.

For now, she tried to make best of it, as she loaded bags of groceries into her car. “As long as I’m with my family, I’ll be fine,” she said.

Bob Berg, a 78-year-old former federal prosecutor, has lived in his Corpus Christi home for 35 years. He said he had never left for any of the previous storms that had hammered that part of

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Texas. He had no plans to leave now.

Mr. Berg, whose wife died 10 years ago, said his daughter, a doctor in Galveston, has called him to check in. But he laughed it off, instead giving her advice on how to keep his grandchildren safe during the storm.

Mr. Berg boarded up the windows like he usually did, and he had an old radio in his wood shop

tuned to local weather reports. At the advice of a friend, he had even dug out his old collection of pistols lest anyone consider looting after the storm passed. Only one of them still worked.

“I wish it were a good day, so I could work on my boat,” he said, gesturing toward a wooden boat he has been building. “What can we do? It’s Mother Nature. We just wait it out until it’s over with.”

—*Erica E. Philips and Alexa Corse contributed reporting to this article.*

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