

Wilma wreaked havoc with weaker winds

November 7 2005

Hurricane Wilma may have generally wreaked havoc across Florida last month, but meteorologists say it did it with mostly Category 1 wind speeds.

Officials say the fact that hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed and millions of people were left without electricity demonstrates a major hurricane is not needed to produce major damage.

Officially, the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center say Wilma was a Category 3 storm when it hit southwest Florida near Naples early Oct. 24 and diminished to a Category 2 when it exited the eastern part of the state. But NWS Meteorologist Robert Molleda told the Palm Beach (Fla.) Post he saw mostly evidence of Category 1 damage, with only pockets of more severe havoc, during an aerial inspection after the storm.

And a University of Florida scientist said five mobile wind gauges along Wilma's path recorded essentially Category 1 sustained winds across the state of Florida.

The weather service said no official gauge on land in Florida measured sustained Category 3 wind speeds of 125 mph, the Post reported. And only two official sites -- Lake Okeechobee's south end and Biscayne Bay -- recorded even Category 2 winds.

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