New Hurricane Classification System Can Better Assess the Human Experience

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The loss of life and homes due to Hurricane Katrina was a monumental blow. A new study introduces a new scale in which to classify hurricanes—by postlandfall measurements—that could aid in future decision-making, and hopefully, reduce the number of victims. The study is published in the latest issue of *Journal of Coastal Research*.

Most Americans know and use the Saffir-Simpson (SS) scale to classify hurricanes in which a number from 1 to 5 is assigned. The SS scale works to evaluate winds and storm surge over open water in the prelandfall window, but fails to accurately account for the observed impacts over land, said Jason Senkbeil and Scott Sheridan, another ´´S-S´´ duo who have created a new postlandfall Hurricane Classification System (HCS). This system categorizes hurricanes using six variables—open water storm surge, rainfall, duration of hurricane force winds, maximum sustained winds, gust score, and minimum central pressure.

The HCS focuses on the observed storm intensity over land, and in turn, the human experience. This variation to the SS scale was made to reflect the changing emphasis of hurricane damage. Over the last 50 years, coastal population growth and increased property development have lead to a rise in monetary damage from hurricanes. And while the potential loss of life is always a concern, the increasing property destruction suggests a shift from fatality prevention to the protection of property.

People need to understand the severity of the storm postlandfall to know

if their evacuation or preparation decisions were warranted based on the observed damage at their individual locales, said the study's authors. Senkbeil and Sheridan evaluated 41 hurricanes from 1960 to 2004 using their new scale. From these evaluations, the public can better assess evacuation decisions in the future. While the HCS isn't meant to replace the standard SS scale, it will reconcile the differences between forecasted and observed intensity.

To read the entire study, click here:
www.allenpress.com/pdf/coas_22_518_1025_1034.pdf

Source: Alliance Communications Group

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