

Hurricane center chief leaves with warning

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U.S. National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield ended his career at the Miami storm center with a warning that the worst was yet to come.

Mayfield said he is convinced that residents in the Southeast are flirting with disaster by developing homes in the tropical storm zone while not developing an escape plan, The Los Angeles Times said.

"We're eventually going to get a strong enough storm in a densely populated area to have a major disaster," he said. "I know people don't want to hear this, and I'm generally a very positive person but we're setting ourselves up for this major disaster."

More than 1,300 deaths were attributed to Hurricane Katrina but Mayfield warned that 10 times as many deaths could result from a huge storm during the highly active hurricane cycle, expected to last another 10 to 20 years.

The technology exists to build high-rises capable of withstanding hurricane-force winds, Mayfield said in the Times' article. What's lacking, he said, is political will to enforce tough building codes and land-use rules.

Mayfield, who ended his 34-year career with the National Weather Service Tuesday, told the Times he would like to become an emergency planning and disaster response consultant.

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