

Forecasters predict 6 Atlantic hurricanes for 2009

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A palm tree is hit by winds near the beach in La Ceiba, Honduras as Hurricane Felix approaches in 2007. Six hurricanes are expected to churn through the Atlantic this year, a Colorado State University forecast team said Tuesday as it lowered its estimates for the upcoming storm season.

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If the predictions are accurate, 2009 would be much calmer than last year, which was one of the most active seasons on record with 16 tropical storms, including eight that became hurricanes.

Hurricanes Bertha in July, Gustav in August, Ike in September, Omar in October and Paloma in November were all intense storms that wreaked

serious damage in the United States and the Caribbean.

Of 12 predicted tropical cyclones for 2009, six were [forecast](#) to become hurricanes, including two expected to develop into intense or major hurricanes Category Three or higher.

Earlier predictions from the group had called for 14 tropical cyclones -- or what forecasters call "named storms" -- this [hurricane season](#), lasting between June 1 and December 30.

"We are calling for an average hurricane season this year -- about as active as the average of the 1950-2000 seasons," the team's lead forecaster, Phil Klotzbach, said in a statement.

The University of Colorado team based its projections on the potential for a weak El Nino maritime temperature fluctuation, along with an unusual cooling of tropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures it observed in recent months.

Cooler water temperatures tend to make for a less active hurricane season in the region, the researchers noted.

The researchers also predicted a 31 percent chance that the US Gulf Coast, between Florida and Texas where many major oil companies have rigs off the coast, would be hit by a major hurricane.

The hurricane team forecast an average major hurricane landfall risk in the Caribbean. It is set to issue forecast updates on June 2, August 4, September 2 and October 1.

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