

# Oil clean-up faces hurricane threat: forecast

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Five major hurricanes are forecast to slam into the United States this year, potentially hampering efforts to clean up the devastating Gulf of Mexico oil spill, scientists reported Wednesday.

Forecasters from Colorado State University increased their [hurricane](#) outlook for 2010, citing warmer-than-normal tropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures and cooling tropical Pacific conditions.

A total of 18 named storms were forecast to form in the Atlantic basin between June 1 and November 30, with five expected to develop as major hurricanes packing winds of 111 mph or greater. Since 1950, an average of 2.3 major hurricanes have formed in the region.

"We have increased our forecast from early April, due to a combination of a transition from El Nino to current neutral conditions and the continuation of unusually warm tropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures," said Colorado State forecaster William Gray.

"We anticipate a well above-average probability of United States and Caribbean major hurricane landfall."

Lead forecaster Phil Klotzbach warned that the probability of a major hurricane hitting the US coastline was 76 percent, compared with a last-century average of 52 percent.

Klotzbach said if the hurricane season unfolds as forecast, it could impact the clean-up of the mammoth oil spill in the Gulf, churning tarry

waters towards land.

"If the storm tracks to the west of the oil, there is the potential that the counter-clockwise circulation of the hurricane could drive some of the oil further towards the US Gulf Coast," Klotzbach said.

The forecasters said there was a 51 percent chance of a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast west of the Florida panhandle.

The United States's eastern seaboard also had a 51 percent chance of a major hurricane while the Caribbean was judged to face a 65 percent threat.

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