

Tropical Storm Maria weakens near Caribbean

September 10 2011

(AP) -- Tropical Storm Maria weakened slightly as it neared Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands on Saturday, but no further change in strength is expected, forecasters said.

The storm had winds of 45 mph (75 kph) with higher gusts and was located 245 miles (395 kilometers) east of San Juan, Puerto Rico, late Saturday afternoon, said the U.S. Hurricane Center in Miami, Florida. All [tropical storm](#) warnings have been discontinued.

As the storm approached, tourists lounged on the beach in the popular travel destination of Condado to soak up the sun.

"We just decided, you know what, even if it hits, we don't care," said 29-year-old Keri Chitester. "We just wanted to get out of Pittsburgh."

Puerto Rican officials warned Maria could dump up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain on already saturated soil, leading to numerous landslides in what has been one of the rainiest years on record.

In the eastern seaside town of Naguabo, Mayor Maritza Melendez asked that hundreds of residents in six coastal neighborhoods evacuate because they were at risk of [landslides](#) and heavy flooding.

Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands are still trying to recover from [Hurricane Irene](#), which barreled through the region in late August, killing at least eight people.

"For all my Puerto Rican friends, this last one was distressful," said Philip Rothrock, of Manchester, New Hampshire, who is temporarily working in the U.S. territory. "No power, no water. ... (Maria) is going to delay full restoration of services."

The Puerto Rican government canceled most 9/11 remembrance acts scheduled for Sunday.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, Gov. John de Jongh canceled an overnight curfew because of the storm, which has forced the cancellation of numerous flights.

The government warned of heavy rains through Monday, which proved a boon to some businesses.

Salespeople at one boutique in St. John replaced a rack of discount blouses with rainy-weather items, selling eight raincoats in two hours.

"We usually have fun items, but today, with the weather, we switched it out," said sales clerk Sharece Smith.

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