

Geophysicist: Weight of Harvey rains caused Houston to sink

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In this Tuesday, Aug. 29, 2017, file photo, water from Addicks Reservoir flows into neighborhoods as floodwaters from Tropical Storm Harvey rise in Houston. For small businesses, the recovery from hurricanes and other natural disasters can take years, if they can recover at all. Business owners in Houston have only just started assessing their damage and how to move forward. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip, File)

A California geophysicist says the sheer weight of the torrential rains brought by Harvey has caused Houston to sink by 2 centimeters.

Chris Milliner, a postdoctoral fellow at NASA's Jet Propulsion

Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology, says water weighs about a ton per cubic meter and the flooding was so widespread that it "flexed Earth's crust."

He told the Houston Chronicle that he used observations from the Nevada Geodetic Laboratory and other statistics to measure the drop.

Milliner says it will only be temporary. Once the floodwaters recede, there will be an "opposite elastic response of the crust," similar to jumping on a mattress.

He refers to the phenomenon as local elastic subsidence and says it's found in other places that experience significant seasonal changes in water or ice.

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