

# Most of Houston 'now dry,' as recovery begins

September 1 2017, by Mark Ralston, With Michael Mathes In Port Arthur

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The First Baptist Church in Rockport, Texas, is in ruins after Hurricane Harvey

Houston was limping back to life on Friday one week after Hurricane Harvey slammed into America's fourth-largest city and left a trail of devastation across other parts of southeast Texas.

"Most of the city is now dry," Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner told MSNBC. "And so we're turning to recovery and housing, especially for individuals whose homes were greatly damaged."

As flood waters receded in Houston and residents began slowly returning home other nearby towns such as Rockport, Beaumont and Port Arthur were struggling to get back on their feet.

Rescue workers were still scouring storm-ravaged southeast Texas by air and by boat looking for victims trapped in their flooded homes.

Harvey has been blamed thus far for at least 42 deaths and tens of billions of dollars of damage.

### **'We need the resources yesterday'**

Turner estimated that around 40,000 to 50,000 homes in the Houston area had suffered damage after Harvey made landfall last Friday as a Category Four hurricane, and said federal assistance was needed urgently.

"We need the resources now," Turner told CNN. "In fact let me back that up. We need the resources yesterday."

President Donald Trump visited Texas on Tuesday and is scheduled to return to the Lone Star State again on Saturday.



Floodwaters cover streets in Nome, Texas, following Hurricane Harvey

"Texas is healing fast thanks to all of the great men & women who have been working so hard," he tweeted Friday morning. "But still so much to do. Will be back tomorrow!"

Turner, the Houston mayor, said providing housing is "critically important."

"People can't stay in shelters forever," he said.

An estimated 30,000 residents of the Houston area sought refuge from the storm in public shelters and many will be returning to homes that are now uninhabitable because of flood damage.

Besides their homes, tens of thousands of residents also lost their

vehicles in a state where having a car is considered a must.

## Debris removal a priority

Removing debris was also essential, the Houston mayor said.

"People returning to their homes, they're putting all of that debris out," he said. "You can't leave it out there. That will create a public health hazard."

Texas Governor Greg Abbott told ABC his state was facing a "massive, massive clean-up process."



A member of the US Air National Guard surveys flood damage in Houston

"People need to understand this is not going to be a short-term project," he said. "This is going to be a multi-year project for Texas to be able to dig out of this catastrophe."

"As the waters recede in Houston, of course they're still rising over in Beaumont," he said.

A major hospital in Beaumont began evacuating its 200-odd patients on Thursday after the city's water supply failed and a dozen premature babies were airlifted out on Friday.

The authorities in Crosby, Texas, were monitoring a chemical plant meanwhile where fires broke out Wednesday night.

Officials ordered residents living within 1.5 miles of the facility to evacuate amid concerns about the fumes emanating from the plant, which produces organic peroxides—compounds that can combust if not cooled to the right temperature.

Rachel Moreno of the Fire Marshal's Office said there had been no further fires or smoke overnight at the chemical plant in Crosby, 25 miles (40 kilometers) northeast of Houston

"We have been hearing popping noises, which is the organic peroxides decomposing," Moreno said.

## **Houston Astros coming home**

In Rockport, where Harvey made landfall, the schools were closed and many residents were without power.



Floodwaters on Telephone Road in Houston on August 30

Telephone and electricity poles were down in many parts of the town of 10,000 on the Gulf Coast. Rockport's First Baptist Church was in ruins, its roof ripped off, and many homes were just piles of shattered debris.

Vice President Mike Pence visited Rockport on Thursday and promised to provide assistance to residents of the battered town.

In a sign of a return to normality in Houston, the city's Major League Baseball team, the Houston Astros, announced they would return home for games on Saturday and Sunday against the New York Mets.

The Astros abandoned their home stadium, Minute Maid Park, this week for three games in Florida against the Texas Rangers.

"We hope that these games can serve as a welcome distraction for our city that is going through a very difficult time," said Astros president Reid Ryan in a statement. "We hope that we can put smiles on some faces."

While baseball was coming back, schools in the Houston area were assessing when they could reopen with most looking at Tuesday of next week, according to the Houston Chronicle.

Schools had been scheduled to resume classes on Monday August 28 after the annual summer break but those plans were put on hold by the storm.

Richard Carranza, superintendent of Houston's largest school district, told the Chronicle that at least 35 schools had sustained water or wind damage or lost power during the storm.

So with school still out, many families with children headed instead to Houston Zoo—which partially reopened—and could be seen there early in the morning, strolling the grounds.

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