

Port city hunkers down as Hurricane Florence whips through

September 14 2018, by Sébastien Duval



The historic North Carolina town of Wilmington stood largely deserted as Hurricane Florence swept over it

In the port city of Wilmington, residents awoke to the sound of power transformers blowing up, plunging homes into darkness as Hurricane

Florence's howling winds whipped through the streets sending metal signs, water and debris flying.

The North Carolina town stood largely deserted as the storm swept in, leaving a trail of smashed windows, downed [trees](#) and road signs bent double by the force of the wind.

With residents either evacuated or hunkered down for safety, the historic city center—normally a charming hub for summer tourists—was a mess of air-conditioning units stripped from walls, drains and sewers overflowing and power cables dangling perilously over the streets.

Even though Florence was downgraded late Thursday to a Category 1 storm before making landfall, it wrought substantial damage in this area of the North Carolina shoreline, and authorities warned the storm would remain a serious danger for the coming 36 hours.

Many residential streets were blocked by fallen trees, with firefighters working in one neighborhood to rescue family members after a tree came down on their home—injuring at least one person.

"It's a difficult situation for all of us," said city fire chief Buddy Martinette.

Dock worker Franck Bryant had volunteered to help clear the roads, but was waiting in the shelter of a parking lot with his dog Diamond for the winds to die down enough for him to start the job.



Firefighters pray during an operation to remove a tree that fell on a house as Hurricane Florence struck Wilmington, North Carolina on September 14, 2018

"It got a little sparty," he said, wearing a yellow fluorescent work vest and hard hat. "Trees fell down, power lines too. Some roads were flooded, you can't drive through them with a normal sized car."

Nocturnal explosions

"Keep your head up," Bryant advised as he pointed out a sheet of metal hanging precariously from an apartment block.

People's home were plunged into darkness in the early morning, as electric transformers exploded one after the other.



Wilmington's city center—normally a charming hub for summer tourists—was a mess of air-conditioning units stripped from walls, drains and sewers overflowing and power cables dangling perilously over the streets

But some residents chose to act as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. Four young people were walking their dog, holding beers and cigarettes in their hands and seemingly unconcerned by the debris littering the sidewalk.

A few others were venturing out on the streets even though gusts of strong wind occasionally knocked them sideways.

The eye of the hurricane passed over the town shortly after dawn.

"And it's just a Category 1 hurricane. I wonder how it would have been with a Category 4 or 5?" said Mason Tarr, standing on the steps of the building where he sought shelter the night before.



A car destroyed by falling bricks as Hurricane Florence passes over Wilmington, North Carolina

"Our house is on high ground, so we're not worried about the flooding. But there are a lot of big trees around, so we prefer to spend the night at a friend's to be sure," he said.

"Didn't sleep that well last night. We're out of power, so we spent the first few hours of the day playing board games with candles."

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