

Deadly Hurricane Dorian parks itself over the Bahamas

September 3 2019, by Ramon Espinosa, Dánica Coto And Michael Weissenstein



Strong winds move the palms of the palm trees at the first moment of the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday Sept. 1, 2019. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Practically parking itself over the Bahamas for a day and a half,

Hurricane Dorian pounded away at the islands Tuesday in a catastrophic onslaught that sent floodwaters up to the second floors of buildings, trapped people in attics and chased others from one shelter to another. At least five deaths were reported.

"We are in the midst of a historic tragedy," Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said. "The devastation is unprecedented and extensive."

The storm's relentless winds and rain battered homes and businesses on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama, which have a combined population of about 70,000 and are no more than 40 feet (12 meters) above sea level at their highest points. The Grand Bahama airport was under 6 feet (2 meters) of water.

Desperate callers trying to find loved ones left messages with local radio stations as the country's health minister said medical teams would be sent to the Abaco islands by the afternoon.

As of daybreak, Dorian's winds had dipped to 120 mph (193 kph), making it a still highly dangerous Category 3 hurricane, and the storm was barely moving at 1 mph (2 kph), with part of its eyewall hanging over Grand Bahama Island since Sunday night.

The storm was centered 40 miles (70 kilometers) northeast of Freeport and 110 miles (175 kilometers) northeast of West Palm Beach, Florida. Hurricane-force winds extended out as far as 45 miles (75 kilometers) in some directions.



Strong winds from Hurricane Dorian blow the tops of trees and brush while whisking up water from the surface of a canal that leads to the sea, located behind the brush at top, seen from the balcony of a hotel in Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Monday, Sept. 2, 2019. Hurricane Dorian hovered over the Bahamas on Monday, pummeling the islands with a fearsome Category 4 assault that forced even rescue crews to take shelter until the onslaught passes. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Dorian was expected to approach the Florida coast later Tuesday, but the threat to the state eased significantly, with the National Hurricane Center's projected track showing most of the coast just outside the cone of potential landfall. No place in Florida had more than an 8% chance of getting hit by hurricane-force winds.

As Labor Day weekend drew to a close, hundreds of thousands of people in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina—more than 800,000 in South Carolina alone, and a half-million in Georgia—were warned to evacuate for fear Dorian could bring life-threatening storm-surge flooding even if the hurricane's center stayed offshore, as forecast. Several large airports announced closings, and hundreds of flights were canceled.

The U.S. Coast Guard airlifted at least 21 people injured on Abaco Island, which Dorian hit on Sunday with sustained winds of 185 mph (295 kph) and gusts up to 220 mph (355 kph), a strength matched only by the Labor Day hurricane of 1935, before storms were given names.

Scientists say climate change generally has been fueling more powerful and wetter storms, and the only recorded hurricane more powerful than Dorian was Allen in 1980, with 190 mph (305 kph) winds, though it did not hit land at that strength.



Surfers take advantage of waves at Anglin's Fishing Pier in Lauderdale-By-The-Sea, Fla., Monday, Sept. 2, 2019, as Hurricane Dorian crawls toward Florida, while the storm continues to ravage the Bahamas. (David Santiago/Miami Herald via AP)



People stand on the boardwalk along the Atlantic Ocean at night as the outer bands of Hurricane Dorian reach Vero Beach, Fla., Monday, Sept. 2, 2019. The National Hurricane Center extended watches and warnings across the Florida and Georgia coasts Monday. Forecasters expected Dorian to stay off shore, but meteorologist Daniel Brown cautioned that "only a small deviation" could draw the storm's dangerous core toward land. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



A beach goer climbs the stairs near the Juno Beach Pier as Hurricane Dorian crawls toward Florida while the storm continues to ravage the Bahamas on Monday, Sept. 2, 2019. (Carl Juste/Miami Herald via AP)



Juno Beach residents Anneka, 8, left, and sister, Breanna, 10, right, along with their mother, Leah Hanza, center, get a close look of the waves crashing against the Juno Beach Pier as Hurricane Dorian crawls toward Florida, and it continues to ravage the Bahamas on Monday, Sept. 2, 2019. (Carl Juste/Miami Herald via AP)



Ethan Van Cleave, 12, stands near a departure area as hundreds of local residents board buses at Lanier Plaza to leave the area under mandatory evacuation ahead of Hurricane Dorian, Monday, Sept. 2, 2019, in Brunswick, Ga. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)



Glynn County school resource officer Mark Hooper, left, and school support staff member Sheree Armstrong, right, help Elizabeth Scales board a special needs bus at Lanier Plaza as hundreds of local residents evacuate the area under mandatory evacuation ahead of Hurricane Dorian, Monday, Sept. 2, 2019, in Brunswick, Ga. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)



Leonard Baker, left, looks on as his dog Chick is loaded on a bus as they and other locals board buses at Lanier Plaza to leave the area under mandatory evacuation ahead of Hurricane Dorian, Monday, Sept. 2, 2019, in Brunswick, Ga. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)



People walk the shoreline of Juno Beach near the pier under high gust winds as Hurricane Dorian crawls toward Florida while the Category 4 storm continues to ravage the Bahamas on Monday, Sept. 2, 2019. (Carl Juste/Miami Herald via AP)

Bahamian officials said they received a "tremendous" number of calls from people in flooded homes. One radio station said it got more than 2,000 distress messages, including reports of a 5-month-old baby stranded on a roof and a woman with six grandchildren who cut a hole in a roof to escape rising floodwaters. At least two designated storm shelters flooded.

Dorian was blamed for one death in Puerto Rico at the start of its path

through the Caribbean.

Minnis said many homes and buildings were severely damaged or destroyed. Choppy brown floodwaters reached roofs and the tops of palm trees.

Parliament member Iram Lewis said he feared waters would keep rising and stranded people would lose contact with officials as their cellphone batteries died.



Glynn County school resource officer Mark Hooper, left, and school support staff member Sheree Armstrong, right, help Elizabeth Scales board a special needs bus at Lanier Plaza as hundreds of local residents evacuate the area under mandatory evacuation ahead of Hurricane Dorian, Monday, Sept. 2, 2019, in Brunswick, Ga. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)

"It is scary," he said, adding that people were moving from one shelter to another as floodwaters kept surging. "We're definitely in dire straits."

Forecasters said that the storm had come to a near standstill because the steering currents in the atmosphere had collapsed, but that Dorian would resume moving later in the day, getting "dangerously close" to the Florida coast through Wednesday evening, very near the Georgia and South Carolina coasts Wednesday night and Thursday, and near or over the North Carolina shoreline late Thursday.

Meteorologist Daniel Brown cautioned that even "a small deviation" in its projected track could take the storm toward land.

In South Carolina, Interstate 26 was turned into a one-way evacuation route away from Charleston on the coast, and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp likewise planned to reverse lanes on I-16 on Tuesday to speed the flow of traffic away from the danger zone.

"We're taking the 'better safe than sorry' attitude," Kemp said.

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