

Hurricane Dorian pummels Bahamas with Category 5 assault

September 2 2019, by Ramón Espinosa And Dánica Coto



A man stands on a store's roof as he works to prepare it for the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Freeport on Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Hurricane Dorian hovered over the Bahamas on Monday, pummeling the islands with a fearsome Category 5 assault that shredded roofs, hurled cars and forced even rescue crews to take shelter until the onslaught passes.

The storm's top sustained winds fell slightly to 165 mph (270 kph), and its westward movement slowed almost to a standstill. The system crawled along Grand Bahama Island at just 1 mph (2 kph).

"We need you to bunker down," Kwasi Thompson, minister of state for Grand Bahama, warned people. "It's going to be another 10-12 hours that we're going to be bombarded with this."

Thompson and other officials said they were getting distress calls about rising floodwaters but said rescuers could not go out in the violent weather.

"They are ready to get into those areas as soon as the weather subsides," he said.

On Sunday, Dorian churned over Abaco Island with battering winds and surf and unleashed heavy flooding as people called [radio stations](#) and sent desperate messages on social media to find loved ones.

"We received catastrophic damage here in Abaco," Parliament member Darren Henfield told reporters. He said officials did not have information yet on what happened in nearby cays. "We are in search and recovery mode. ... Continue to pray for us."



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)

Information began emerging from other affected islands, with Bahamas Power and Light spokesman Quincy Parker telling ZNS radio station that there was a total blackout in New Providence, the archipelago's most populous island. He also said the company's office in Abaco island was flattened by the storm.

"The reports out of Abaco as everyone knows," Parker said as he paused for a deep sigh, "were not good."

Meanwhile, Don Cornish, island administrator for Grand Bahama Island,

told The Associated Press that officials received many calls from people in distress about flooded homes.

Most people went to shelters as the storm neared. Tourist hotels shut down, and residents boarded up their homes. But many people were expected to be left homeless.

"It's devastating," Joy Jibrilu, director general of the Bahamas' Ministry of Tourism and Aviation, said Sunday afternoon. "There has been huge damage to property and infrastructure. Luckily, no loss of life reported."



Women sit on cots inside a church now serving as a shelter for residents who will wait out Hurricane Dorian in Freeport on Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength

winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

On Sunday, Dorian's maximum sustained winds reached 185 mph (297 kph), with gusts up to 220 mph (354 kph), tying the record for the most powerful Atlantic [hurricane](#) to ever make landfall. That equaled the Labor Day hurricane of 1935, before storms were named. The only recorded storm that was more powerful was Hurricane Allen in 1980, with 190 mph (305 kph) winds, though it did not make landfall at that strength.

Forecasters said Dorian was likely to begin pulling away from the Bahamas early Tuesday and curving to the northeast parallel to the U.S. Southeast seaboard. The potent storm was expected to stay close to shore and hammer the coast. Authorities cautioned that it could still make landfall on the East Coast.

An advisory from the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami warned that Florida's east-central coast could see a brief tornado sometime Monday afternoon or evening.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster issued an order Sunday for the mandatory evacuation of his state's entire coast. The order, which covers about 830,000 people, was to take effect at noon Monday, at which point state troopers were to make all lanes on major coastal highways one-way heading inland.

"We can't make everybody happy, but we believe we can keep everyone alive," McMaster said.



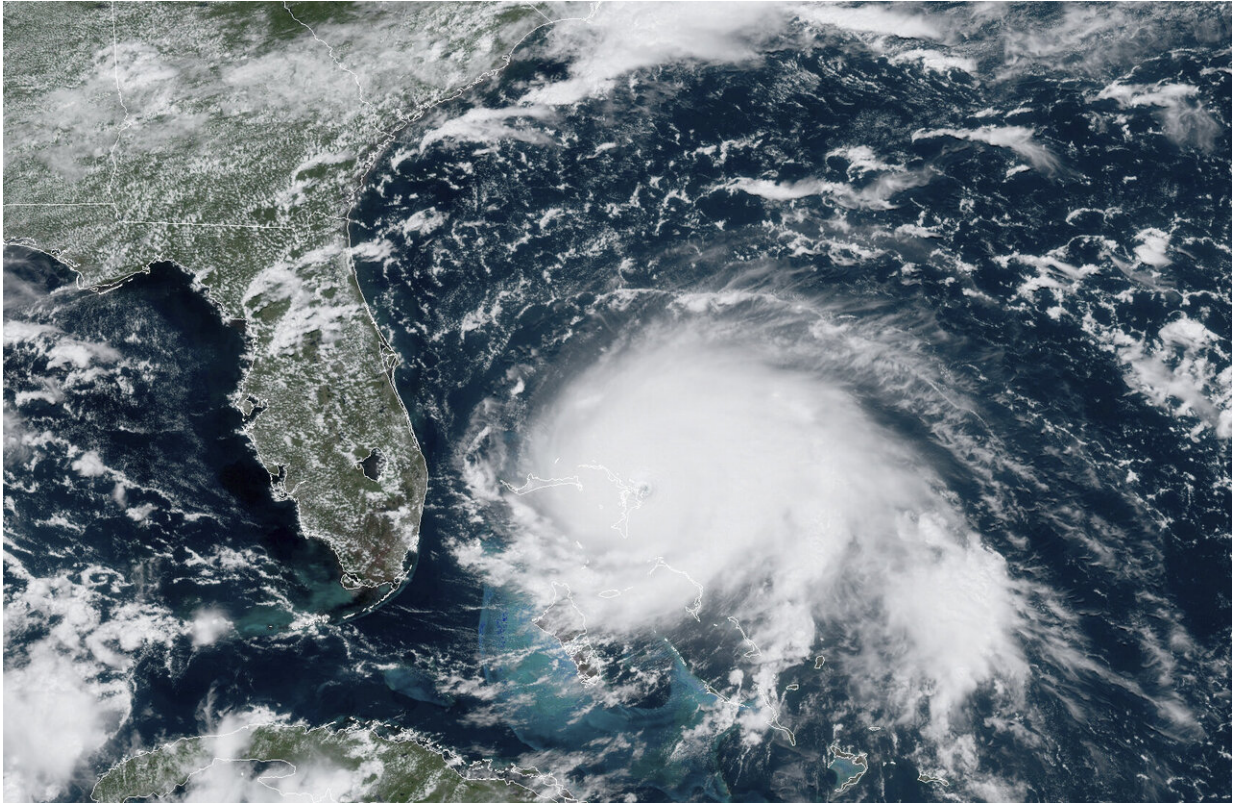
Yolande Rolle puts sandbags at her shop's doorstep as she prepares for the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Freeport on Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



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A car returns to the capital under the previous rain before the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday Sept. 1, 2019. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



This GOES-16 satellite image taken Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019, at 17:00 UTC and provided by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), shows Hurricane Dorian, right, churning over the Atlantic Ocean. Hurricane Dorian struck the northern Bahamas on Sunday as a catastrophic Category 5 storm, its 185 mph winds ripping off roofs and tearing down power lines as hundreds hunkered in schools, churches and other shelters. (NOAA via AP)



A baby sleeps inside a church that was opened up as a shelter for residents who will wait out Hurricane Dorian in Freeport on Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



An evacuee lies on a cot at an evacuation shelter for people with special needs, in preparation for Hurricane Dorian, at Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School in Stuart, Fla., Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Some coastal areas are under a mandatory evacuation since the path of the storm is still uncertain. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



Florida Department of Health staffers set up beds at an evacuation shelter for people with special needs, in preparation for Hurricane Dorian, at Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School in Stuart, Fla., Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Some coastal areas are under a mandatory evacuation since the path of the storm is still uncertain. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



Alex Filipovski of Martin County Fire and Rescue helps evacuee Don Penlonas wheel into an evacuation shelter for people with special needs, in preparation for Hurricane Dorian, at Dr. David L. Anderson middle School in Stuart, Fla., Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Some coastal areas are under a mandatory evacuation since the path of the storm is still uncertain. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



Karen Alexis, a Florida Department of Health staffer, gets information from an evacuee, at an evacuation shelter for people with special needs, in preparation for Hurricane Dorian, at Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School in Stuart, Fla., Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Some coastal areas are under a mandatory evacuation since the path of the storm is still uncertain. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)



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President Donald Trump, left, listens as Kenneth Graham, director of NOAA's National Hurricane Center, on screen, gives an update during a briefing about Hurricane Dorian at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019, in Washington, at right of Trump is Acting Administrator Pete Gaynor, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and acting White House chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Andrew Wheeler, and Neil Jacobs, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)



Seagulls fly toward a woman feeding them french fries from her car on Taino beach before the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



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A few hours later, Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp, ordered mandatory evacuations for that state's Atlantic coast, also starting at midday Monday.

Authorities in Florida ordered mandatory evacuations in some vulnerable coastal areas. North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper warned his state that it could see heavy rain, winds and floods later in the week.

Dorian first came ashore Sunday at Elbow Cay in Abaco Island, then made a second landfall near Marsh Harbour. A storm surge was reported at 18 to 23 feet (5.5-7 meters).

Video that Jibrilu and government spokesman Kevin Harris said was sent by Abaco residents showed homes missing parts of roofs, electric lines on the ground and smashed and overturned cars. One showed floodwaters rushing through the streets of an unidentified town at nearly the height of a car roof.

In some parts of Abaco, "you cannot tell the difference as to the beginning of the street versus where the ocean begins," Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said. According to the Nassau Guardian, he called it "probably the most sad and worst day of my life to address the Bahamian people."



Anastacia Makey, 43, far right, looks at her phone as she and her family sits on cots with other residents inside a church that was opened up as a shelter as they wait out Hurricane Dorian in Freeport on Grand Bahama, Bahamas, Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. Hurricane Dorian intensified yet again Sunday as it closed in on the northern Bahamas, threatening to batter islands with Category 5-strength winds, pounding waves and torrential rain. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

The Bahamas archipelago is no stranger to hurricanes. Homes are required to have metal reinforcements for roof beams to withstand winds into the upper limits of a Category 4 hurricane, and compliance is generally tight for those who can afford it. Risks are higher in poorer neighborhoods, with wooden homes in low-lying areas.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Dorian is forecast to be 40 to 50 miles (64 to 80 kilometers) off Florida, with hurricane-force wind speeds extending about 35 miles (56 kilometers) to the west.

The hurricane center issued a hurricane watch for Florida's East Coast from Deerfield Beach north to the Georgia state line. The same area was put under a storm surge watch. Lake Okeechobee was under a tropical storm watch.

Mandatory evacuation orders for low-lying and flood-prone areas and mobile homes were in effect from Palm Beach County north to at least the Daytona Beach area, and some counties to the north issued voluntary evacuation notices. Weekend traffic was light in Florida despite those orders, unlike during the chaotic run-up to Hurricane Irma in 2017, when the unusually broad storm menaced the entire state.

Ken Graham, director of the hurricane center, urged people not to bet on safety just because the forecast track had the storm a bit offshore. With every new forecast, "we keep nudging (Dorian's track) a little bit to the left"—that is, is closer to the Florida coast, Graham said.

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Citation: Hurricane Dorian pummels Bahamas with Category 5 assault (2019, September 2)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2019-09-hurricane-dorian-pummels-bahamas-category.html>

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