

Hurricane Genevieve lashing Mexico's Baja with wind and rain

August 20 2020, by Ignacio Martínez De Jesús

Hurricane Genevieve lost some of its punch as it passed the southern end of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula Thursday, though it is still lashed the tourist region with hurricane-force gusts and heavy rains.

Genevieve had a been a powerful Category 4 hurricane with winds of 130 mph (215 kph) on Tuesday, but weakened to Category 1 strength as it pushed past the Los Cabos region, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

Meanwhile a new tropical depression formed in the Atlantic and it was expected to become a tropical storm that would move near or north of the Leeward Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The center said the hurricane was expected to stay out in the Pacific while moving northwestward along the Baja coast and weakening Thursday and Friday. But it was raking the shore with tropical storm-forces winds and hard rains that carried the potential for dangerous flooding.

High surf had already claimed two lives in the area. Police in Cabo San Lucas said a 15-year-girl was trapped by a large wave and an adult tried to save her Tuesday. Both died.

The hurricane center said Genevieve had maximum sustained winds of 75 mph (120 kph) Thursday morning and it was centered about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west-northwest of the southern tip of the Baja

peninsula. It was moving to the northwest at 12 mph (19 kph).

As rain and winds began to hit the region Wednesday, authorities went door-to-door encouraging people living in low-lying areas to move to shelters.

Los Cabos civil defense director Erick Santillán said more than 100 people were in shelters. More than 10,000 families live in flood-prone informal settlements in homes of wood and cardboard in Cabo San Lucas areas that usually have to be evacuated when storms approach.

Los Cabos Mayor Armida Castro Guzmán said the shelters were staffed with medical personnel and there were locations to isolate COVID-19 positive or suspected cases.

Baja California Sur state officials said 15,000 foreign tourists were in the state, most in the Los Cabos region, which earlier had almost been emptied of visitors by pandemic restrictions. Hotel occupancy was at 20%.

The storm was expected to drop as much as 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of rain over parts of Baja California Sur state as it advanced, bringing the possibility of flash floods and mudslides. Up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) was possible in isolated areas, the hurricane center said.

In the Atlantic, a new tropical depression formed Thursday morning with maximum sustained winds near 35 mph (55 kph). The depression was expected to strengthen later in the day to a tropical storm, the National Hurricane Center said. The depression was centered about 830 miles (1,335 kilometers) east-southeast of the Northern Leeward Islands and is moving west-northwest near 21 mph (33 kph).

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