

Tropical Storm Elsa makes landfall, heads to Georgia

July 7 2021, by Curt Anderson and Russ Bynum



A jogger makes his way along Bayshore Blvd., in Tampa, Fla. as a wave breaks over a seawall, during the aftermath of Tropical Storm Elsa Wednesday, July 7, 2021. The Tampa Bay area was spared major damage as Elsa stayed off shore as it passed by. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux

A weakened Tropical Storm Elsa dumped rain across Florida's northern

Gulf Coast early Wednesday, sparing the state from significant damage as it churned toward Georgia with threats of flooding downpours and possibly tornadoes.

Elsa wobbled through the Gulf of Mexico, briefly reaching hurricane strength, but moved ashore as a tropical storm late Wednesday morning. The U.S. National Hurricane Center said the storm made landfall in lightly populated Taylor County, Florida, with maximum sustained winds of 65 mph (105 kph).

Gov. Ron DeSantis told a news conference that no major structural damage or storm deaths had been reported.

"Clearly, this could have been worse," the Republican governor said, though he cautioned that many storm-related deaths happen after the system passes. "Be very careful when you're working to clear debris."

Even after Elsa struck land, tropical storm warnings remained Wednesday afternoon along Florida's Big Bend as well as for the entire Georgia and South Carolina coasts. Tornado watches were also in effect in parts of northern Florida and southeast Georgia until 8 p.m. Wednesday.

Scattered power outages were being reported along Elsa's path Wednesday afternoon, with about 30,000 homes and businesses on either side of the Georgia-Florida state line without electricity, according to the website poweroutages.us.



Pedestrians dash across the intersection of Greene and Duval streets as heavy winds and rain associated with Tropical Storm Elsa passes Key West, Fla., on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The weather was getting worse in southern Florida on Tuesday morning as Tropical Storm Elsa began lashing the Florida Keys, complicating the search for survivors in the condo collapse and prompting a hurricane watch for the peninsula's upper Gulf Coast. Credit: Rob O'Neal/The Key West Citizen via AP

In Steinhatchee, Florida, not far from where Elsa came ashore, there was some flooding, but no worse than the town typically sees from heavy rain, said Melissa Roper, whose family owns Off The Clock Fisheries and Marina along the Steinhatchee River.

"It's definitely a lot better than expected considering it was supposed to be a hurricane that hit," Roper said. "We're pretty fortunate."

Elsa's center was forecast to cross into southeast Georgia on Wednesday afternoon, bringing a risk of flooding from an anticipated 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) of rain. The storm was forecast to move into South Carolina early Thursday, and by Friday its effects could be felt as far north as New England.

The storm complicated the search for potential survivors and victims in the collapse of a Miami-area condominium on June 24. Regardless, crews continued the search in the rubble of Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida, on the state's southeast coast.



A cyclist makes his way long Bay Pines Boulevard the morning after Hurricane Elsa moved over the Tampa Bay Area, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in St. Petersburg, Fla. Credit: Martha Asencio-Rhine/Tampa Bay Times via AP

The storm also temporarily halted demolition Wednesday on the remainder of an overturned cargo ship off the coast of Georgia. The South Korean freighter Golden Ray capsized in September 2019 off St. Simons Island, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of Savannah. Crews have removed more than half the ship since November.

Most salvage workers were sheltering indoors Wednesday, said Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Himes, a spokesperson for the multiagency command overseeing the demolition. The towering crane being used to cut the ship apart into giant chunks remained in place straddling the wreck, stabilized by mooring lines attached to anchors and pilings. The crane was also anchored to the shipwreck itself, which weighs about 13,200 tons (12,000 metric tons), Himes said.

"As far as the wreck shifting, that's highly unlikely," Himes said.



About 250 electrical utility trucks are lined up at Duke Energy's staging location in The Villages of Sumter County on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. Elsa may hit central Florida on Tuesday and Wednesday, with possible localized flooding. Duke Energy staged a total of about 500 trucks at the location, and they will be deployed following Elsa to repair damage to electrical lines and poles. Credit: Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel via AP

Himes said crews would be watching to see if Elsa's winds scatter any debris from the ship into the surrounding water. The vessel's remains are open at both ends, like a giant tube on its side, and its cargo decks still contain hundreds of bashed and mangled cars.

At the Hillbilly Fish Camp and R.V. Park in the south Georgia town of Waycross, Margie Freitag hunkered down Wednesday after pulling boats

out of the water and picking up loose items ahead of the storm. Freitag said she had plenty of supplies after stocking up for the coronavirus pandemic.

"We already had flashlights and batteries and were totally stocked up with food, water and things like that," she said. "We're right on the lake and we can see the rain hitting and wind coming across the lake."

Out on Edisto Beach, South Carolina, where a [tropical storm](#) warning was in effect, Wednesday started muggy and overcast.



Luis Ernesto catches a small wave while surfing along Pass-a-Grille Beach, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in St. Pete Beach, Fla., the morning after Tropical Storm Elsa moved over the Tampa Bay Area. Credit: Martha Asencio-Rhine/Tampa Bay Times via AP

"The kind of day you can just feel the weather wanting to move in," Mayor Jane Darby said.

The forecast for the barrier island 30 miles (48 kilometers) down the coast from Charleston was similar to a heavy summer thunderstorm – an inch or two (2.5 to 5 centimeters) of rain, winds gusting up to about 40 mph (64 kph) and maybe a little beach erosion with the worst of Elsa expected between low and high tides. Other South Carolina beaches expected similar conditions, coming mostly overnight to be less of a bother to visitors during an extremely busy summer.

"Businesses are struggling with workers in short supply a lot more than they are going to be bothered by this storm," Darby said. "That's where the stress is now."

Elsa is already the third tropical system to hit South Carolina. In June, Tropical Storm Claudette moved across the northern part of the state after making landfall in Louisiana and Tropical Storm Danny hit land near Hilton Head Island. Both storms caused only minor damage.



A man treads water and awaits rescue crews approximately 32 miles southeast of Key West, Fla., on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The U.S. Coast Guard and a good Samaritan rescued 13 people after their boat capsized off of Key West as Tropical Storm Elsa approached. Credit: U.S. Coast Guard via AP



A couple of signs hang loose on their post after Hurricane Elsa moved over the Tampa Bay Area, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in Pinellas Park, Fla. The Tampa Bay area was spared major damage as Elsa stayed off shore as it passed by. Credit: Martha Asencio-Rhine/Tampa Bay Times via AP



The Coast Guard Cutter Thetis' crewmembers deploy the cutter's small boat to rescue people in the water approximately 32 miles southeast of Key West, Fla., on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The U.S. Coast Guard and a good Samaritan rescued 13 people after their boat capsized off of Key West as Tropical Storm Elsa approached. Credit: U.S. Coast Guard via AP



Shawn Frazier, 61, reinforces tarps over his Tampa home's roof ahead of Tropical Storm Elsa on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. Frazier said there was some leaking he caught during a recent rainy day. Credit: Ivy Ceballo/Tampa Bay Times via AP



Crew members aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Thetis provide medical attention people rescued from the water approximately 32 miles southeast of Key West, Fla., on Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The U.S. Coast Guard and a good Samaritan rescued 13 people after their boat capsized off of Key West as Tropical Storm Elsa approached. Credit: U.S. Coast Guard via AP



Beach walkers walk along the sand on Pass-a-Grille the morning after Tropical Storm Elsa moved over the Tampa Bay Area, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in St. Pete Beach, Fla. Credit: Martha Asencio-Rhine/Tampa Bay Times via AP



Cranes cross the road during a rainstorm from Tropical Storm Elsa, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in Westchase, Fla. The Tampa Bay area was spared major damage as Elsa stayed off shore as it passed by. Credit: Arielle Bader/Tampa Bay Times via AP



Fallen trees block Front Street on Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in Valrico. Tropical Storm Elsa continued to track north after dropping heavy rain in the Tampa Bay area. Credit: Luis Santana/Tampa Bay Times via AP



Palm leaves lay on the ground following heavy rain and wind from Tropical Storm Elsa, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in Westchase, Fla. The Tampa Bay area was spared major damage as Elsa stayed off shore as it passed by. Credit: Arielle Bader/Tampa Bay Times via AP



Michael Ciarleglio with the city of Pinellas Park, cleans up a few tree branches while working the morning after Hurricane Elsa moved over the Tampa Bay Area, Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in Pinellas Park, Fla. The Tampa Bay area was spared major damage as Elsa stayed off shore as it passed by. Credit: Martha Asencio-Rhine/Tampa Bay Times via AP

Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard said 13 people were rescued from a boat that had left Cuba with 22 people aboard late Monday. Nine people remained missing.

Elsa is the earliest fifth-named [storm](#) on record, said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

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Citation: Tropical Storm Elsa makes landfall, heads to Georgia (2021, July 7) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-tropical-storm-elsa-landfall-georgia.html>

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