

Hurricane Ida forecast to strengthen as it nears Louisiana

August 29 2021, by Rebecca Santana and Kevin McGill



Michael Richard of Creole Cuisine Restaurant Concepts boards up Crescent City Pizza on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter before landfall of Hurricane Ida in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Richard said the group is planning to board up and protect 34 restaurants owned by the company for the storm. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton

Forecasters warned residents along the northern Gulf of Mexico coast to rush preparations ahead of Hurricane Ida, which is expected to rapidly intensify and bring winds as high as 130 mph (209 kph), life-threatening storm surge and flooding rain when it slams ashore Sunday in Louisiana.

The National Hurricane Center warned that super-warm Gulf waters are expected to soon rapidly magnify Ida's [destructive power](#), boosting it from a Category 2 storm to an extremely dangerous Category 4 hurricane in just 18 hours or less. Landfall was expected Sunday afternoon.

Coastal highways saw heavy traffic Saturday as people moved to escape the storm's path. Trucks pulling saltwater fishing boats and campers streamed away from the coast Interstate 65 in south Alabama. Traffic jams clogged Interstate 10 heading out of New Orleans.

"We're going to catch it head-on," said Bebe McElroy as she prepared to leave home in the coastal Louisiana village of Cocodrie. "I'm just going around praying, saying, 'Dear Lord, just watch over us.'"

Ida was poised to strike Louisiana 16 years to the day after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts. A Category 3 storm, Katrina was blamed for 1,800 deaths and caused levee breaches and catastrophic flooding in New Orleans, which took years to recover.

"We're not the same state we were 16 years ago," Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said Saturday, pointing to a federal levee system that's seen major improvements since Katrina swamped New Orleans in 2005.



Vehicles head slowly east on the Interstate-10 twin spans leaving New Orleans while only a trickle of cars heads west back into the city before landfall of Hurricane Ida in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. A combination of voluntary and mandatory evacuations have been called for cities and communities across the region including New Orleans, where the mayor ordered a mandatory evacuation for areas outside the city's levee system and a voluntary evacuation for residents inside the levee system. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton

"This system is going to be tested," Edwards said. "The people of Louisiana are going to be tested. But we are resilient and tough people. And we're going to get through this."

Edwards said 5,000 National Guard troops were being staged in 14

parishes for search and rescue efforts with high-water vehicles, boats and helicopters. And 10,000 linemen were on standby to respond to electrical outages.

A [tropical depression](#) two days earlier, Ida was strengthening so quickly that New Orleans officials said there was no time to organize a mandatory evacuation of the city's 390,000 residents, a task that would require coordinating with the state and neighboring locales to turn highways into one-way routes away from the city.

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell called for a voluntary evacuation and reiterated Saturday that the time to safely leave was growing short. Collin Arnold, the city's emergency management director, said the city could be under high winds for about 10 hours. Officials warned those who stayed to be prepared for long power outages amid sweltering heat in the days ahead.



Jawan Williams shovels sand for a sandbag held by his son Jayden Williams, before landfall of Hurricane Ida at the Frederick Sigur Civic Center in Chalmette, La., which is part of the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Hurricane Ida looks an awful lot like Hurricane Katrina, bearing down on the same part of Louisiana on the same calendar date. But hurricane experts say there are differences in the two storms 16 years apart that may prove key and may make Ida nastier in some ways but less dangerous in others..Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton

Ramsey Green, the city's top infrastructure official, stressed that the levee and drainage systems protecting the city have been much improved since Katrina.

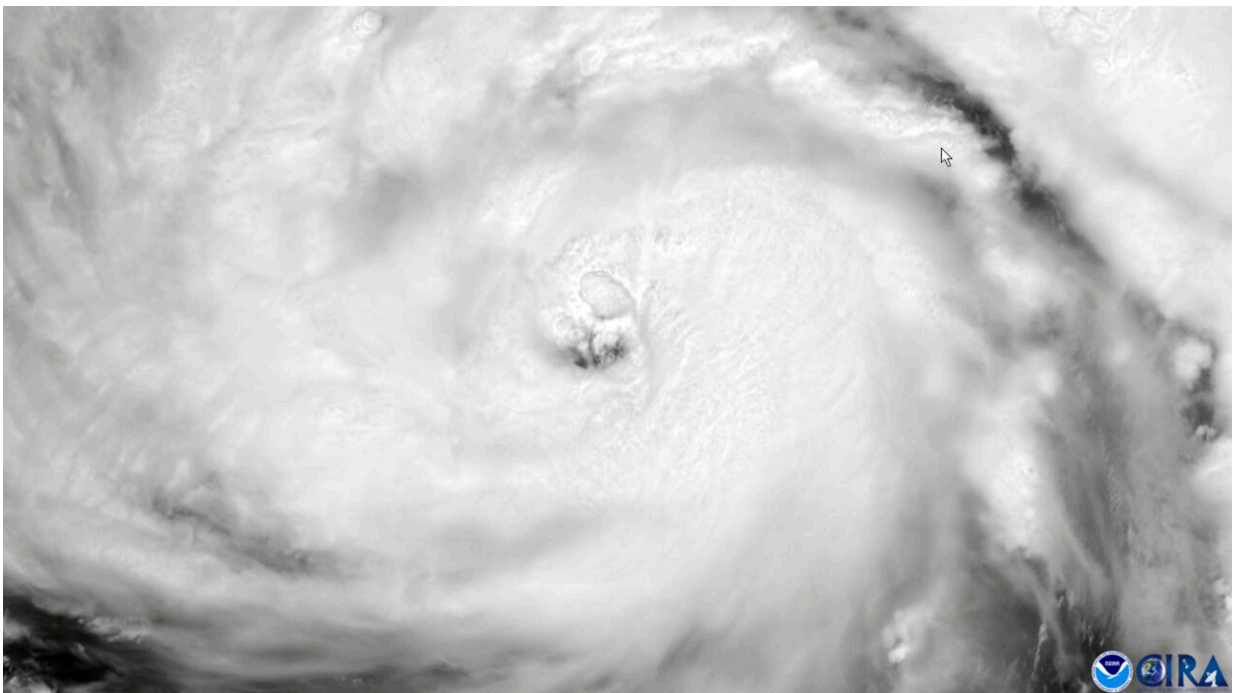
"That said, if we see 10 to 20 inches of rain over an abbreviated period

of time, we will see flooding," he said.

In Washington, President Joe Biden on Saturday called Ida "very dangerous" and urged Americans "to pay attention and be prepared."

Lines at [gas pumps](#) and car rental agencies grew long as residents and tourists alike hastened to leave Saturday.

"We were willing to wait it out but the hotel said we had to leave," said visitor Lays Lafaurie of Fort Worth, Texas, waiting in a rental car line at the city's airport. "They said we had to leave by 7 tomorrow morning. But if we'd waited that long there wouldn't have been any cars left."



This satellite image provided by NOAA shows a view of Hurricane Ida, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Forecasters warned residents along the northern Gulf of Mexico coast to rush preparations Saturday ahead of an intensifying Hurricane Ida, which is expected to bring winds as high as 130 mph (209 kph),

life-threatening storm surge and flooding rain when it slams ashore in Louisiana on Sunday. Credit: NOAA via AP

Ida posed a threat far beyond New Orleans. A [hurricane warning](#) was issued for nearly 200 miles (320 kilometers) of Louisiana's coastline, from Intracoastal City south of Lafayette to the Mississippi state line. A tropical storm warning was extended to the Alabama-Florida line, and Mobile Bay in Alabama was under a storm surge watch.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey declared a state of emergency Saturday for the state's coastal and western counties, warning Ida could bring flooding and tornadoes there.

In Mississippi, Gov. Tate Reeves urged residents to stay off of interstate highways to make room for people evacuating from Louisiana. He said 19 shelters had opened to take in evacuees. Several casinos on the Mississippi coast had closed ahead of Ida.

Meteorologist Jeff Masters, who flew hurricane missions for the government and founded Weather Underground, said Ida is forecast to move through "the just absolute worst place for a hurricane."



Local residents fill sand bags as they prepare for the expected arrival of Hurricane Ida Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, in Gulfport, Miss. Credit: AP Photo/Steve Helber

The Interstate 10 corridor between New Orleans and Baton Rouge is a critical hub of the nation's petrochemical industry, lined with oil refineries, natural gas terminals and chemical manufacturing plants. Entergy, Louisiana's major electricity provider, operates two nuclear power plants along the Mississippi River.

A U.S. Energy Department map of oil and gas infrastructure shows scores of low-lying sites in the storm's projected path that are listed as potentially vulnerable to flooding. Phillips 66 said it was shutting operations at its refinery in Belle Chasse, Louisiana.

Many gas stations in and around New Orleans were out of gas, and the few still open had lines more than a dozen cars deep.

Mike Laurent of Marrero, Louisiana, was filling up about a dozen gas canisters to fuel his generator and those of friends and family. Laurent said his family planned to weather the storm at home despite concerns about whether the nearby levee would hold.



Gregory Moore, right, helps a local residents fill sand bags as they prepare for the expected arrival of Hurricane Ida Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, in Gulfport, Miss. Credit: AP Photo/Steve Helber



A crew covers windows along Julia St. in the Central Business District as Hurricane Ida approaches the Louisiana coast in New Orleans, La. Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Residents across Louisiana's coast rushed to prepare for the approach of an intensifying Hurricane Ida. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slams ashore late Sunday. Credit: Max Becherer, NOLA.com, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



Westbound I-10 traffic on the Bonnet Carré Spillway is slow going at 4:00 a.m. near Kenner, La. Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, as many New Orleans area residents evacuate ahead of Hurricane Ida. Residents across Louisiana's coast are taking one last day to prepare for what is being described as a "life-altering" Hurricane Ida. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph (225 kph) when it slams ashore. Credit: David Grunfeld, NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



In preparation of Hurricane Ida, a workers attach protective plywood to windows and doors of a business in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Gay



Michael Richard of Creole Cuisine Restaurant Concepts boards up Crescent City Pizza on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter before landfall of Hurricane Ida in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Richard said the group is planning to board up and protect 34 restaurants owned by the company for the storm. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton



Sandbags are in place at Satsuma restaurant in New Orleans on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Normally bustling on a weekend morning, the popular breakfast spot was closed while taking protections against possible flash floods as Hurricane Ida approached the Louisiana coast. Credit: AP Photo/Kevin McGill



In preparation of Hurricane Ida, a worker attaches protective plywood to windows and doors of a business in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Gay



Local residents fill sand bags as they prepare for the expected arrival of Hurricane Ida Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, in Gulfport, Miss. Credit: AP Photo/Steve Helber



Jawan Williams loads his vehicle with sandbags before landfall of Hurricane Ida at the Frederick Sigur Civic Center in Chalmette, La., which is part of the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slams ashore late Sunday. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton



Louisiana National Guard rescue boats are seen staged at Jackson barracks in New Orleans, La. Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Residents across Louisiana's coast rushed to prepare for the approach of an intensifying Hurricane Ida. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slams ashore late Sunday. Credit: Max Becherer, NOLA.com, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



Keith Clark brings a friend rope to help tie down a houseboat before he evacuates to Mandeville, La. ahead of Hurricane Ida in Jean Lafitte, La., Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Forecasters warned residents along the northern Gulf of Mexico coast to rush preparations Saturday ahead of an intensifying Hurricane Ida, which is expected to bring winds as high as 130 mph (209 kph), life-threatening storm surge and flooding rain when it slams ashore in Louisiana on Sunday. Credit: Sophia Germer/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



Clouds pass by the Central Business District (CBD) including the Superdome before Hurricane Ida makes landfall in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Residents across Louisiana's coast are taking one last day to prepare for what is being described as a "life-altering" Hurricane Ida. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph (225 kph) when it slams ashore. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton



Commercial crabbers Derek Grose, right, Joe Becker, center, and Patrick Nata collect crab traps before the flood wall closes as Hurricane Ida approaches the Louisiana coast in St. Bernard, La. Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Residents across Louisiana's coast rushed to prepare for the approach of an intensifying Hurricane Ida. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slams ashore late Sunday. Credit: Max Becherer, NOLA.com, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



The Rouses grocery in Morgan City, La., is boarded up as residents prepare for the arrival of Hurricane Ida on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. The storm is expected to bring winds as high as 140 mph when it slams ashore late Sunday Credit: Chris Granger/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



Troy Leonard, far left, a retired Louisiana State Trooper said he finally had the time to help secure sandbags around three homes of family members riding out Hurricane Ida in the Morgan City, La., area on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. He said this is the first time in 28 years he hasn't had to work during a hurricane. Credit: Chris Granger/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



In preparation of Hurricane Ida, a worker attaches protective plywood to windows and doors of a business in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Gay



A man sits in front of a French Quarter business with windows boarded in preparation Hurricane Ida, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021, in New Orleans,. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Gay



In preparation of Hurricane Ida, a worker attaches protective plywood to windows and doors of a business in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Gay

"I don't think it's ever been tested like it's going to be tested tomorrow or Monday," Laurent said. "I bought a dozen life jackets, just in case."

Ida was a Category 2 hurricane late Saturday night with maximum sustained winds of 105 mph (168 kph). The storm was centered about 235 miles (375 kilometers) southeast of coastal Houma, Louisiana, and traveling northwest at 16 mph (26 kph). Ida's core was also about 145 miles (235 kilometers) south-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River.

Cuba started to clean up Saturday after Ida tore through Isla de la Juventud and then western parts of the mainland. The storm toppled trees and damaged crops and buildings. There were no reported deaths.

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Citation: Hurricane Ida forecast to strengthen as it nears Louisiana (2021, August 29) retrieved 16 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-hurricane-ida-nears-louisiana.html>

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