

As Ian barrels toward Florida, residents brace for hurricane hell

September 27 2022, by Gerard MARTINEZ



Volunteers and city employees were scrambling to fill and load sandbags ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Ian, which US forecasters say is headed for a direct and potentially catastrophic hit on Tampa, Florida.

Soon to be in the teeth of a monster storm, anxious Tampa residents

were making final preparations Tuesday ahead of potentially catastrophic Hurricane Ian, which is forecast to slam Florida's west coast with a ferocity unseen here in decades.

Authorities have issued evacuation orders for more than two million Floridians, including those in the most vulnerable areas around the Tampa Bay, where inlets, canals and waterways are susceptible to the mass flooding and life-threatening storm surges expected when Mother Nature unleashes its fury on Florida beginning Tuesday night.

City employees were filling and handing out free sandbags at various locations, where long lines of cars could be seen as residents scrambled for ways to protect their property.

Amanda Harrison, 66, told AFP she waited two hours at a distribution point to get "the maximum number of bags" to line her home ahead of Ian's wrath. "And my fears are that they're not going to do any good."

A 100-mile (160-kilometer) stretch from Ft Myers north to Tampa is under the most serious threat, as Ian battered Cuba Tuesday as a Category 3 [major hurricane](#) and began building in intensity over the warm Gulf of Mexico waters on its way north.

Fearing it could hit as a highly dangerous Category 4, Floridians were stocking up on [bottled water](#), food, and other emergency supplies like batteries and propane gas. At a home improvement store in west Tampa, dozens of customers were buying plywood to protect their homes.

Others loaded up the family car to exit the hurricane zone.

Chelsea Thompson and her husband rushed to her parents' home in St Petersburg, southwest of Tampa, early Tuesday to help them board up doors and windows with plywood.

Her parents' home is in one of the mandatory evacuation zones and the family knew there was no time to lose.



Danny Aller and his wife Karen board up windows as they prepare for the arrival of Hurricane Ian in Indian Shores, Florida, 25 miles west of Tampa.

"The closer it (Hurricane Ian) gets, obviously with the unknown, your anxiety gets a little higher," said 30-year-old Thompson.

"Boarding up the house makes it more real too," she added. "So I am pretty nervous, but hoping for the best."

While her parents were leaving the city with their dog, bound for inland

Orlando, Thompson and her husband decided to ride out the [hurricane](#) in their own, less vulnerable home.

"We're hoping that it takes a little bit of a turn... so we don't get as much impact" from Ian, she added.

While Tampa braced for potential disaster, resident Ricardo Castro said taking necessary pre-storm steps was crucial.

"A lot of people are worried, but I'm from Puerto Rico and this is normal for us," said the 48-year-old longtime Tampa resident, referring to the US island territory battered by massive Hurricane Fiona one week earlier.

As he and a neighbor waited for sandbags, Castro jumped out of his car to help fill bags and hand them out.

"If you prepare," he said, "everything will be fine."

Danny Aller and his wife Karen were leaving little to chance. Twenty five miles west of Tampa in Indian Shores, the couple were boarding up their modest home with plywood bearing a blunt, spray-painted message: "Go away Ian."

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