

Headed for Mexico, Hurricane Norma downgraded to still-dangerous Category 3

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Hurricane Norma is approaching Mexico's Pacific coast.

Hurricane Norma weakened Thursday to a Category 3 storm as it headed for Mexico's Pacific coast—still strong enough to cause flash floods and damage, forecasters said.

By 2100 GMT on Thursday, the tropical storm was downgraded by one category on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale of the US National Hurricane Center (NHC), which grades hurricanes up to a maximum Category 5.

Norma was located about 265 miles (425 kilometers) west of Manzanillo in the western Mexican state of Colima, it said, with winds exceeding 125 miles (205 kilometers) per hour and stronger gusts.

The storm was traveling northward towards the Baja California peninsula at a speed of about six miles per hour.

"Some weakening is expected during the next few days, but Norma is forecast to be a hurricane when it moves near the southern portion of Baja California" by Friday night and Saturday, said the NHC.

Norma could reach San Jose del Cabo in the Baja California Sur state by Saturday as a Category 1 hurricane, and again overnight Sunday in Culiacan in the state of Sinaloa, the Conagua national water commission said in a statement.

As the storm headed for the peninsula that includes the beach resort of Los Cabos popular with American and other tourists, the government activated a national emergency plan.

More than 6,600 soldiers were placed on alert in the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur, said the national defense secretariat, with a focus on the cities of San Quintin, Mulege and La Paz.

"From experience (we know) we need to move fast to put in place teams to help the population, and food," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador told reporters Wednesday.

Mexico's Conagua national water commission said Norma could make landfall twice, reaching San Jose del Cabo in Baja California Sur by Saturday as a Category 1 hurricane, and again overnight Sunday in the state of Sinaloa.

Flash flooding

According to the NHC, Norma "is likely to produce rainfall totals of 5 to 10 inches... through Sunday across the far southern portion of the Mexican state of Baja California Sur," said the statement, with localized downpours of as much as 15 inches.

"These rains will likely produce flash and urban flooding, along with possible mudslides in areas of higher terrain."

The center also warned that ocean swells "are likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions."

Conagua said it was monitoring water levels in rivers, streams and dams, with several already brimming.

Hurricanes hit Mexico every year on both its Pacific and Atlantic coasts, usually between May and November.

Just last week, the country's west was hit by Hurricane Lidia, which left at least two dead after making landfall as a Category 4 storm, causing flooding.

Days earlier, Tropical Storm Max left two people dead and dozens of

houses flooded in the southern state of Guerrero, one of the country's poorest regions, authorities said Tuesday.

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer with climate change.

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