Forecasters predict multiple US hurricane landfalls

April 27 2011

File picture from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) shows Hurricane Earl as it passes along the North Carolina Outer Banks. Several powerful storms will likely strike the US mainland this hurricane season, especially in the oil-rich Gulf of Mexico region, a prominent weather forecaster said.

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Weather Services International predicts 15 storms strong enough to be named, eight hurricanes and at least four hurricanes of category 3 strength or greater on the five-level Saffir-Simpson scale.

"We do expect another active season in 2011, although not to the level of 2005 or 2010," said WSI chief meteorologist Todd Crawford.

WSI forecasters "expect a much more impactful season along the US coastline," he said in a statement.

No hurricane has struck the US mainland since 2008, an unusual three-year drought unseen since the 1860s. "Our recent good fortune in avoiding landfalling hurricanes is not likely to last," said Crawford.

The US Gulf Coast is especially threatened this hurricane season, which runs from June 1 through November 30.

The Gulf and Caribbean sea surface temperatures "are particularly warm this year, and we expect more development in these regions and less in the eastern tropical Atlantic.

"Storms developing in the Gulf and Caribbean are a much greater threat to make landfall along the US coast than those that develop off the coast of Africa," said Crawford.

The 2011 forecasts by WSI, a member of The Weather Channel Companies, are similar to those ahead of the 2008 season, when Hurricanes Dolly, Gustav, and Ike struck Louisiana and Texas in the US Gulf Coast.

The current forecast revises a December forecast predicting 17 named storms, nine hurricanes, and five intense hurricanes.

The forecast was changed because tropical Atlantic sea surface has since cooled, and the La Nina event weakened faster than expected, reducing the chances of big Atlantic storms during the upcoming tropical season, said Crawford.

La Nina is associated with cooler than normal waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

The 2010 Atlantic storm season was the third busiest on record, with 19 named tropical storms over the Americas and the Caribbean, 12 of which became hurricanes.

Last year's hurricanes contributed to epic flooding and mudslides throughout Central and South America, causing massive damage and extensive loss of life.

In early April forecasters at Colorado State University predicted 16 named storms this year, nine of which will form in the Atlantic and will develop into hurricanes.

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Citation: Forecasters predict multiple US hurricane landfalls (2011, April 27) retrieved 16 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2011-04-multiple-hurricane-landfalls.html

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