

# Hurricane Irma Has Miami In Its Sights After Cutting Deadly Swath In Caribbean

Hurricane Irma was on a track to slam Miami as it continued to cut a destructive swath through the Caribbean islands Thursday, leaving death and destruction in its wake.

As of 10 a.m., the glamorous Florida city was 60 hours from feeling the first effects of a killer storm that has already been blamed for nine deaths across a string of islands and has left more than a million people in Puerto Rico in the dark, NBC News' Weather Unit warned.

"We likely will not know the fate of Miami until Irma turns north either Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening," the meteorologists said in an update.

The good news is that Irma "has peaked in intensity" and likely to weaken very slowly over the next four days, they said.

But even a slightly weaker Irma could do serious damage to Miami and lash the low-lying city with 129 mph winds and gusts of up to 159 mph.

"Miami has no choice but to prepare for a strong Category 4 hurricane," the NBC meteorologists warned. "Most of the damage in South Florida is expected from the storm surge and winds."

And when Irma is done with Miami, it is expected to make landfall late Monday or early Tuesday further north in Georgia and South Carolina, the NBC forecasters said. The governors of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina have declared states of emergency.

The dire forecast came after Irma battered the tiny island of Barbuda and left thousands homeless on the island territories of St. Bart and St. Martin, where local officials said about 95 percent of the island was completely demolished after Wednesday's thrashing by the Category 5 storm.

"If you're told to evacuate, get out quickly," Florida Gov. Rick Scott warned.

“Based on what we now know, Miami-Dade will have major hurricane impacts with deadly storm surge, deadly storm surge and life-threatening winds.”

Some 31,000 people have already fled the Florida Keys, which will start feeling the sting of Irma as early as Friday night, Scott said. And while South Florida is in Irma’s bull’s-eye right now, the whole state is in danger.

“Look at the size of this storm,” Scott said. “It’s huge. It’s wider than our entire state and could cause major and life-threatening impacts on both coasts. Coast to coast.”

Scott invoked the memory of Hurricane Andrew, a Category 5 storm that struck 25 years ago, killing 44 people and doing more than an adjusted \$47.8 billion in damage just in the Sunshine State alone. It nearly wiped the city of Homestead off the map.

“This is much worse and more devastating on its current path,” Scott said.

Florida is working to get more fuel into the state as many areas are running low on gas. About 43% of gas stations in Miami-Fort Lauderdale are without fuel, according to GasBuddy.

“We know fuel is very important. And we’re absolutely devoting every state resource to addressing this and we’re talking to the federal government about their support,” Scott said.

In Washington, President Donald Trump said “Florida is as well prepared as you can be for something like this and we’ll see what happens.”

“We are with the people of Florida,” added the president, whose Mar-a-Lago mansion is located in Palm Beach.

Video obtained by NASA had the eye of Irma, the most powerful Atlantic hurricane on record, passing just to the north of the Dominican Republic on Thursday morning.

“Extremely dangerous Hurricane Irma heading for the Turks and Caicos islands,” the National Hurricane Center warned in an all caps bulletin issued at 11 a.m.. “Hurricane and storm surge watch are in effect for portions of South Florida and the Florida Keys.”

Irma largely spared Puerto Rico, hitting the island with a glancing blow. Gov. Ricardo Rosselló said they were starting the arduous task of assessing damage to the island and restoring power to its hardest hit areas.

Rosselló also warned residents that Puerto Rico still faces possible flash flooding and up to eight inches more rain through Saturday that will complicate the recovery on an island where bent trees, downed light posts and blocked roadways are now a common sight.

“Our objective was and is to save lives,” Rosselló said. “Now comes the evaluation of the damages and reconstruction.”

Over in the French Caribbean territories of St. Bart and St. Martin, stunned survivors were literally picking up the pieces.

“It is an enormous disaster ... I am in shock,” Daniel Gibbs, chairman of a local council on St. Martin, told Radio Caribbean International.

At least eight people were killed and 23 more were injured by the storm, French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said.

“It’s a tragedy, we’ll need to rebuild both islands,” he told French radio France Info. “Most of the schools have been destroyed.”

The Dutch side of St. Martin was also badly damaged. The Dutch government reported it was dispatching 100 soldiers and plane loads of food and water to the island.

One death was reported in the tiny island of Barbuda, where nearly every building was damaged when Irma’s core crossed almost directly over it early Wednesday. Some 60 percent of its roughly 1,400 residents were left homeless, Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne told The Associated Press.

Irma also raked through the British Virgin Islands. In London, Queen Elizabeth released a statement stating that she and Prince Philip were “shocked and saddened by the reports of the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma.”

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