

Coast braces for Floyd

Carolinas threatened as hurricane nears land

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. (AP) — The leading edge of Hurricane Floyd knocked out power, flooded streets with drenching rain and spun off tornadoes last night as the Carolinas braced for a direct hit from the storm.

Its howling winds reduced to a still-dangerous 115 mph, Floyd moved north toward the mostly evacuated area between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington, N.C., after delivering only a glancing blow to Florida and Georgia earlier in the day.

Altogether, authorities have urged more than 2.6 million people along the southern Atlantic coast to clear out of Floyd's path — the biggest peacetime evacuation in United States history.

At 8 p.m. EDT, Floyd was 150 miles south-southwest of Wilmington. The storm's center was moving north at 17 mph and was expected to roll ashore before daybreak today.

By nightfall yesterday, hurricane-strength gusts of 79 mph were buffeting Charleston, S.C., and more than 100,000 people in the area lost power. Several tornadoes struck near Wilmington, destroying one home and damaging seven.

Earlier, in northern and central Florida, Floyd snapped power lines, smashed piers into driftwood and knocked out electricity to 300,000 people. About 350 miles off the coast, the Coast Guard rescued eight people whose tugboat sank in 30-foot seas churned up by the hurricane.

But Floyd made a northward turn that spared Florida and Georgia the catastrophic damage many had feared. NASA's Kennedy Space Center and its four shuttles were largely unscathed.

The Carolinas, however, lay directly in the hurricane's path.

"I know that Florida and Georgia at this point feel like they've dodged a real bullet," North Carolina public safety secretary Richard Moore said. "This thing is not going to miss us."

Myrtle Beach, a usually bustling resort, was a virtual ghost town as people fled or stayed indoors, and highways were jammed around Wilmington. In both Carolinas, many hurricane-hardened people who rode out earlier storms left this time.

Terry Hurley, checking into a Wilmington shelter with his wife and two children, said his family stayed home for Hurricanes Fran and Bertha in 1996, but not for Floyd.

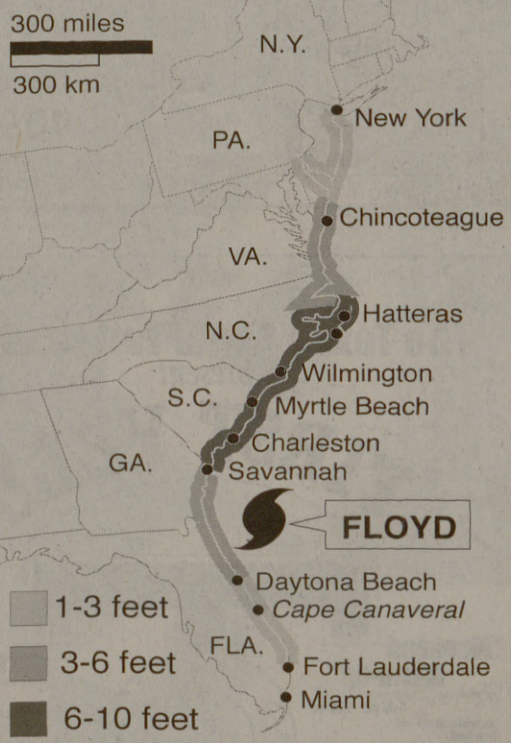
"They talk like this one is going to be pretty mean," he said. "It's got everybody shook up."

Myrtle Beach authorities imposed a 3 p.m. curfew and turned off the water supply. The hospital sent its patients inland but kept a doctor and three nurses on emergency duty.

South Carolina Gov. Jim Hodges banned price

Storm surge

Here is a look at the expected storm surge from Hurricane Floyd through midday Thursday.



Source: AccuWeather AP/Carl Fox



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The leading edge of Hurricane Floyd brought heavy rains and tornadoes yesterday as the East Coast braced for the storm's impending landfall.

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