

Tropical storm graces Texas

Weak storm spoils Labor Day weekend

By Pam Easton
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — A weak tropical storm blew into Texas Sunday and circled over Houston as forecasters concern turned to the flooding it could produce as it moves through the state over the Labor Day holiday.

Grace was downgraded to a tropical depression Sunday, just more than 24 hours after she first developed over the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters.

"It never got fully organized," National Weather Service meteorologist Bill Read said Sunday. "One of the toughest things to forecast is whether it will develop an eye. In this case, it never got that organized ... That's the primary reason it never gained any more strength."

Earlier in the weekend, forecasters were concerned the fast developing storm might strengthen and pack a 65 mph wind punch when it came ashore. Instead the storm never gained momentum as it approached the 200-mile stretch of Texas coast from Corpus Christi to High Island, midway between Galveston and Port Arthur, where a tropical storm warning had been put in place.

"We're still very concerned that for a large chunk of Texas that excessive rain for the next

12 up to 48 hours is going to cause flooding," Read said. "This thing is supposed to slow down as it moves inland."

Rain from Tropical Storm Grace began falling across parts of Texas and southwestern Louisiana Saturday night and storm clouds lingered over much of Southeast Texas Sunday. Read said the storm could dump as much as 12 inches of rain as it continued its movement to the northwest at 15 mph.

"It won't stop raining. It is not causing any flooding now but it will be an issue tomorrow and the next day I guarantee."

— John Simsen,
Galveston County

"It is forecast to slow down to about 5 mph after it gets into South Central Texas," Read said. "That's when you really start to worry about the same areas getting rained on over and over again."

By Sunday morning, meteorologists said rainfall totals in

portions of Harris and Galveston counties were as high as 6 inches with another 9 inches of rain possible by Monday morning.

Officials in several coastal counties, including Brazoria, Matagorda and Galveston, were recommending voluntary evacuations Sunday.

"It was looking pretty good earlier this morning as this thing was starting to break up and not showing any sort of organization," said Galveston County Emergency Management spokesman John Simsen. "The problem is the center reformed over Houston and we have a very horrible dirty side of the storm moving over Bolivar Peninsula."

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Kelli Owens, manager of Galveston's Yaga's cafe, said it was drizzling but that didn't keep her restaurant from filling up at lunch time.

Cpl. C. Langdon with the sheriff's office in Liberty County, where rain had continuously been falling for more than six hours, said deputies were more concerned with falling trees blocking roadways than street flooding.

"Everything is running pretty smooth right now," he said. "We had a couple of trees down and had them cleared of the roadway. We are open — for now."

Border school districts face battle for bilingual teachers

By Lynn Brezosky
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

McALLEN — Schools from across the country often put out a plea in the Texas border country: Spanish speaking teachers needed.

Recruiters buy spots on radio and billboards and promise perks such as sign-on bonuses, laptop computers and big-city living.

Often the search leads to Texas' Rio Grande Valley, considered the one of the biggest producers of teachers needed to keep pace with the nation's increasingly Spanish-speaking students.

But this region along the southern tip of Mexico, where the population is majority Hispanic, administrators contend they have too few bilingual teachers of their own, much less enough to fill the needs of dozens of other school system determined to meet new federal achievement standards.

"The perception is that we prepare so many teachers here that are bilingual that we have a surplus," said Leo Gomez, assistant dean of the University of Texas-Pan American's School of Education. "In fact, we do not meet the demands of our area."

One in five school-age children speak a language other than English at home, most of them Spanish, according to U.S. Census figures. The Hispanic population in the U.S. grew by 3.5 million between 2000 and 2002 — half of the nation's overall population growth. About a third of the nation's Hispanic population is under age 18.

"All of a sudden in Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Georgia, South Carolina, Minnesota — states are just absolutely unprepared for the tremendous amount of children whose first languages are not English," said Maria Hernandez Ferrier, a Laredo native who directs the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition. "Of course, people will come down to Harlingen, Texas, where we are, to recruit."

UT-Pan American is believed to turn out more bilingual teachers than any other campus in the nation, Gomez said. Competition between districts at the School of Education's semiannual job fair is cutthroat, he said.

Some bigger city districts, including the 112,000-student Houston Independent School District (55 percent Hispanic), have tried recruiting in Mexico, as well as in Spain and the Philippines.

They contract with firms such as Span-Tran, a

Houston company that recruits around the world and specializes in matching foreign teachers' transcripts to state education standards. The company also helps people in other careers get alternative certification that gets them in the classroom as they pursue full certification.

"We had to do this because they're not getting the candidates out of the colleges and universities," Span-Tran human resources manager Ronnie Veselka said.

Usually, though, school districts try to lure teachers away from the region's schools. With the federal government providing \$100 million a year to help districts fund training programs for non-English speaking students, wealthier districts can afford to offer incentives. For example, the Aldine Independent School District, just north of Houston, hired 13 teachers from the valley this summer.

Each year, the valley loses more and more bilingual teachers to bigger districts.

The shortage makes UT-Pan American a strong candidate for federal grant programs such as Project Alianza, which scouts border neighborhoods for Mexican immigrants who may have teaching degrees from Mexico.

That's crucial to school districts like La Joya, which is 99 percent Hispanic. Each year, the district must raise its salary offers to teachers with no experience simply because they're bilingual. It sends uses its own recruiters and promotes the region's low cost of living and proximity to Mexico and Gulf Coast beaches.

"It's no longer just salary and fringe benefits," assistant superintendent Anysia Trevino said. "It's getting very competitive. You're selling yourself instead of the teachers selling themselves."

The Alief School District in Houston offered a starting salary of \$41,000 to tempt Felipe Salazar, a 36-year-old former social worker and part-time pastor who wanted to teach elementary students.

The package was \$5,000 over an offer given to his friend — and she was a summa cum laude graduate certified in all levels of math with three years of classroom experience. Salazar is bilingual. She wasn't.

Salazar said while the offer was a good one, he followed the urgings of his conscience, his church, and his dean at the UT-Pan American, who reminded him of his stated commitment to teach in a border district.

He accepted less pay to work in the McAllen school district and now teaches the fifth grade.

"I've never been so happy," he said.

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