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Thousands told to evacuate East Coast More than 10,000 leave due to Hurricane Isabel

By Emery P. Dalesio
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANTEO, N.C. — Traffic surged off the Outer Banks island chain Tuesday as more than 100,000 people were urged to evacuate the North Carolina coast before the arrival of Hurricane Isabel, which had weakened but remained a dangerous storm on a track toward land.

The National Hurricane Center posted a hurricane watch from Little River Inlet, S.C., to Chincoteague, Va., including Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds and a large part of Chesapeake Bay.

On tiny, low-lying Tangier Island in Chesapeake Bay, Wallace Pruitt stored outdoor furniture at the bed-and-breakfast inn he runs with his wife, Shirley.

"I don't usually get too excited about something like this, but this one has so much force I've been preparing for two days," said Pruitt, 63.

Forecasters said Isabel appeared to be on a course to hit Thursday on the North Carolina coast and move northward through eastern Virginia. Large swells and dangerous surf already were being felt along the coast.

The storm's maximum sustained wind had decreased to about 105 mph. More weakening was possible but the storm could strengthen again before landfall, the National Hurricane Center said in Miami.

The latest evacuation orders here for the low-lying Outer Banks islands, including an estimated 75,000 people from Hatteras to Duck in Dare County, plus 15,000 to 20,000 in Currituck County north to the Virginia state line and 13,000 along beaches near Morehead

City in Carteret County. A day earlier, hundreds of residents of vulnerable Ocracoke and Bald Head islands were ordered to evacuate.

Thousands of vacationers and residents left Outer Banks on Tuesday but traffic was moving smoothly. With the storm weakening, many residents appeared ready to stay put.

On Hatteras Island, Margie and Joe Brecker screwed plywood onto the door and windows of their Christmas gift shop in Rodanthe, but left up the colored holiday lights. They planned to stay.

"That way, we are right here when it's time to clean up, and we're able to help others," Margie Brecker said.

Despite the order, Dare County spokeswoman Dorothy Toolan said no one would be forced to leave.

At 2 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Isabel's maximum sustained wind had slowed to near 105 mph, down from about 125 mph at 5 p.m. Monday, making it a Category 2 storm. On Sunday, Isabel's wind had hit 160 mph, making it a Category 5 storm.

The storm was moving north-northwest at around 7 mph and was about 595 miles southeast of North Carolina's Cape Hatteras, the hurricane center reported.

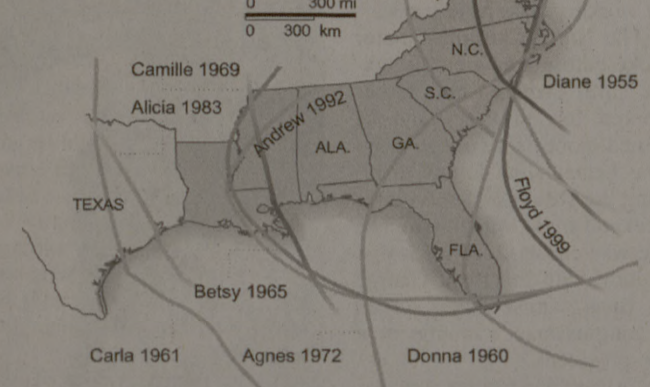
Hurricane center meteorologist Eric Blake said people should not let their guard down even though the storm was weakening.

"Hurricanes are notorious for gaining strength as they cross the Gulf Stream," he said. Even at a Category 2, he added, "there's still a lot of potential for danger."

North of Manteo in Virginia, ships from the Navy's Atlantic Fleet started heading out to sea

Major hurricanes remembered

Forecasters said Hurricane Isabel appeared to be on a course headed for the eastern coast Wednesday night or early Thursday. Major hurricanes in recent memory:



SOURCES: National Weather Service; IRIS Consortium AP

Tuesday from Norfolk, Va., and Earle, N.J., to sail out of the hurricane's direct path and avoid being battered against their piers. The Air Force had started flying airplanes from coastal bases to fields inland.

Moving the ships, manned by some 13,000 sailors, costs "in the millions" but the expense would be far greater if the ships were battered in port, said Adm. Robert J. Natter, commander of the Norfolk-based Atlantic Fleet. "We cannot afford to have these very expensive, valuable national assets caught in port in a storm like this."

Isabel hadn't veered from its expected track, said Lt. Dave Roberts, a Navy meteorologist at the hurricane center. After landfall it could spread heavy rain from North Carolina all the way to the New England states, he said.

Emergency officials in Maryland and Pennsylvania, where the ground already is saturated in places by a wet summer, had started planning for the

possibility of high wind and heavy rain by Friday morning.

The storm could enter Pennsylvania with wind just below the hurricane-strength threshold of 74 mph, said weather service meteorologist John LaCorte in State College, Pa.

New Jersey officials started preparations in areas where Isabel could cause flooding, including Bound Brook, where the Raritan River peaked at 20 feet over flood stage when Hurricane Floyd struck in 1999, and two people died.

Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner had already declared a state of emergency, putting National Guardsmen, state police and transportation crews on full alert and activating about 500 National Guard troops.

Isabel is the first major hurricane to threaten the mid-Atlantic since Floyd wreaked havoc on the East Coast in September 1999, causing 56 deaths.

Antibiotics fail to help heart trouble

By Lindsey Tanner
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Antibiotics failed to ward off heart trouble in the biggest study yet to test the theory that low-level infections play a major role in triggering heart attacks.

Researchers said they are not yet ready to give up on the idea.

The study, published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association, involved 7,722 heart attack patients from North America, Europe, Argentina and India. Taking antibiotics failed to reduce their risk of death or further heart trouble over two years.

In recent years, some research has suggested that painless inflammation from such things as lingering respiratory or urinary infections or even chronic gum disease triggers heart attacks by contributing to the formation of clots in the blood vessels.

Smaller studies have suggested that antibiotics targeting such infections might reduce the risk of heart disease, and some doctors have begun to give heart patients antibiotics based on those findings.

The new study suggests that practice is premature, said Dr. Christopher O'Connor of Duke University, the lead author.

Still, his study suggests there may be some short-term benefits from antibiotic treatment as well as a slight reduction in heart trouble in patients with more than one risk factor, such as those who smoke and have diabetes.

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