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DAVID MASSEY • THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Caitlin Pascucci uses boogie boards to float two 40-pound bags of dog food past a whirlpool of draining floodwaters in the parking lot of an apartment complex Tuesday in Gainesville, Fla.

Post-Frances, Fla. resident head home despite warning

By Jill Barton
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT PIERCE, Fla. — Thousands of residents desperate to return home after fleeing Hurricane Frances ignored Florida's plea to stay put Tuesday, jamming highways, delaying emergency workers and causing tempers to flare in the sticky heat.

One man was so desperate for ice that he shot the lock off a freezer. Fights broke out in some places. Drivers waited for hours to fill up their gas tanks. More than 1,000 cars coiled around several blocks in Stuart as a distribution center watched over by National Guardsmen offered water, ice and ready-to-eat meals.

"Everyone's hot, everyone's sweating so much at night that nobody can sleep. Everyone's tossing and turning. The kids keep crying. I can't take no more of this. Nobody can take this," said Maria Sanchez, 26, who waited more than 90 minutes with her four children to get supplies in Stuart, about 35 miles north of West Palm Beach.

While many began removing debris, clearing downed trees and mopping up the water in their homes, weary Floridians looked over their shoulder at another hurricane several days away in the Atlantic. Ivan could become the third hurricane to hit the state this year, though it was too soon to determine the storm's exact path.

"It almost seems like we've got a 'kick me' sign on the state here," said Max Mayfield, director of the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

As many Floridians went home for the first time since Frances battered the state Sunday, traffic on parts of Interstate 95, the major highway along the Atlantic coast, was double the usual levels. Federal Emergency Management Agency workers trying to reach Martin County

on the southeast coast got stuck in traffic.

About 3 million Floridians were told it could take up to a week to restore power to all of the state with the longest wait for Daytona Beach. It was bad news with high humidity and temperatures hovering around 90 degrees.

"None of the stores have anything that we need. There is no bread to be found, no ice, no water. I'm lucky I got gas this morning," said Serafina Ferreira at a relief site in West Palm Beach, where lines stretched for miles.

St. Lucie County administrator Doug Anderson said, "We had some fights break out already. We are asking the public to please be patient and neighborly. We are all in this together."

Palm Beach County officials reported at least 300 arrests, estimating about 75 people were for violating curfew.

Frances hit a wide swath of Florida's east coast early Sunday with winds of 105 mph and more than 13 inches of rain, ripping off roofs and flooding streets up to 4 feet deep. It weakened the tropical storm before sweeping into the Panhandle on Labor Day, causing little damage there.

The storm's remnants dumped heavy rain Tuesday in Georgia and Alabama, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands and closing schools. In the Carolinas were bracing for a series of tornadoes as a result of the storm. The storm was blamed for at least 18 deaths in Georgia and Florida, in addition to two earlier in the Bahamas.

Frances added to the misery in areas hit by Hurricane Charley, which killed 27 people in southwest Florida last month and caused an estimated \$6.8 billion in insured damage.

Florida chief financial officer Tom Galligan estimated Frances' insured damage Tuesday at \$2 billion to \$4 billion. Total damage is likely to double the insured losses.

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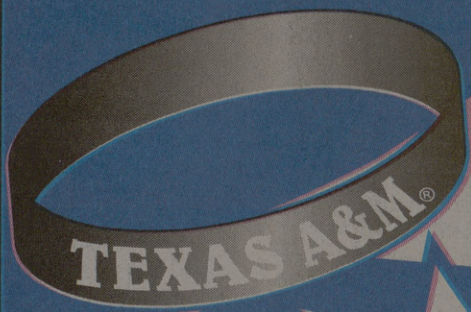
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