

## Hurricane Earl Strengthens To Category 4 Storm

by NPR STAFF AND WIRES



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Gerry Broome/AP

Cars leaving Ocracoke Island on a ferry arrive in Hatteras, N.C., on Wednesday.

*September 1, 2010*

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Hurricane Earl steamed toward the Atlantic Seaboard on Wednesday as communities from North Carolina to New England kept a close eye on the forecast, worried that even a slight shift in the storm's predicted offshore track could put millions of people in the most densely populated part of the country in harm's way.

Vacationers along North Carolina's dangerously exposed Outer Banks took advantage of the typical picture-perfect day just before a hurricane arrives to pack their cars and flee inland, cutting short their summer just before Labor Day weekend.

Governors along the East Coast declared states of emergency, sea turtle nests on one beach were scooped up and moved to safety, and the crew of the Navy's USS Cole rushed to get home to Norfolk, Va., on Wednesday ahead of the bad weather. The destroyer was supposed to return from a seven-month assignment later this week.

Farther up the East Coast, emergency officials urged people to have disaster plans and supplies ready and weighed whether to order evacuations as they watched the latest maps from the National Hurricane Center — namely, the "cone of uncertainty" showing the broad path the storm could take.

Earl was expected to reach the North Carolina coast late Thursday and wheel to the northeast, staying offshore while making its way up the Eastern Seaboard. But forecasters said it could move in closer, perhaps coming ashore in North Carolina, crossing New York's Long Island and passing over the

Boston metropolitan area and Cape Cod.

That could make the difference between modestly wet and blustery weather on the one hand, and dangerous storm surge, heavy rain and hurricane-force winds on the other.

"Everyone is poised and ready to pull the trigger if Earl turns west, but our hope is that this thing goes out to sea and we're all golfing this weekend," said Peter Judge, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

The storm, which was upgraded to a Category 4 on Wednesday afternoon, was still well east of the Bahamas, but tourists on a popular vacation island on North Carolina's Outer Banks were ordered to board ferries and head for the mainland. More evacuations are possible as Hurricane Earl threatens to sideswipe Atlantic Coast states.

North Carolina Gov. Beverly Perdue declared a state of emergency Wednesday at a briefing at the state Emergency Operations Center near the state capital.



Dare County officials had earlier ordered the evacuation of visitors on Hatteras Island just hours after Hyde County officials ordered tourists off neighboring Ocracoke Island. The first ferries began evacuating people to the mainland shortly after 6 a.m. By afternoon, hundreds of cars were backed up in traffic on N.C. Highway 12, the sole link between the fragile barrier islands and the mainland.

Earl has the potential to do significant damage, especially if it tracks west of current predictions. Most models have the center of the hurricane passing well off the North Carolina coast, but it is still expected to pound the state's Outer Banks with high winds and heavy rains by late Thursday

or early Friday.

The North Carolina emergency management officials' evacuation orders started with the 5,000 tourists on Ocracoke Island, which is accessible only by ferry. The 800 or so year-round residents are not required to heed the evacuation call, but Emergency Services Director Lindsey Mooney said officials hope they'll voluntarily follow the tourists.

Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley signed a declaration of emergency Wednesday in preparation for the hurricane, which is expected to reach that state at about 1 a.m. on Friday.

O'Malley advised travelers not to drive to or from Ocean City during the height of stormy weather from Hurricane Earl.

In Virginia, Gov. Bob McDonnell activated the National Guard and sent 200 troops to the Hampton

Roads area on Chesapeake Bay. The area was not expected to get the brunt of Earl, but many remember the surprise fury of Hurricane Isabel, which killed 33 people and did \$1.6 billion in damage in September 2003.

"I'd rather be safe and get our troops and state police in place by Thursday night," he said.

New England also is within the hurricane's reach as it moves farther up the coast by Saturday. Officials in Massachusetts and Rhode Island were preparing for the storm, while in Connecticut authorities were discussing readiness. The National Weather Service predicted that Hurricane Earl would hit up to 100 miles south of Nantucket Island on Friday night.

NWS meteorologist Kevin Cadima said outer Cape Cod and Nantucket were currently forecast to face the brunt of the storm in New England.

"They have the potential to see hurricane-force winds out there. Rhode Island, with the current track, would be on the fringe, on the western fringe, of the tropical storm conditions," Cadima said.

Forecasters cautioned that it's still too early to tell how close Earl might come to land. But not since Hurricane Bob in 1991 has such a powerful storm had such a large swath of the East Coast in its sights, said Dennis Feltgen, spokesman for the National Hurricane Center.

"A slight shift of that track to the west is going to impact a great deal of real estate with potential hurricane-force winds," Feltgen said.

Forecasters on Wednesday announced another tropical storm on the heels of Earl. Gaston, the fourth tropical storm to form in the past 11 days, has formed far out in the Atlantic. The National Hurricane Center in Miami said the storm has sustained winds of 40 mph with higher gusts and was expected to get stronger over the next two days. The center had not issued any watches or warnings for Gaston so far.

On Tuesday, gusty winds from Earl's outer fringes whipped palm fronds and whistled through doors in the Turks and Caicos Islands as tied-down boats seasawed on white-crested surf. Islanders gathered to watch big waves pound a Grand Turk shore as the wind sent sand and salt spray flying.

"We can hear the waves crashing against the reef really seriously," Kirk Graff, owner of Captain Kirk's Flamingo Cove Marina, said by telephone as he watched the darkening skies. "Anybody who hasn't secured their boats by now is going to regret it."

Carl Hanes of Newport News, Va., kept an eye on the weather report as he headed for the beach near his rented vacation home in Avon, N.C. He, his wife and their two teenage children anticipated that Earl might force them to leave Thursday, a day ahead of schedule.

"We're trying not to let it bother us," Hanes said before enjoying the calm surf.

In Rehoboth Beach, Del., Judy Rice said she has no plans to leave the vacation home where she has spent most of the summer. In fact, the Oak Hill, Va., resident plans to walk around town in the rain if it comes.

"I kind of enjoy it, actually. You know, it's battling the elements," Rice said. "I have seen the rain go sideways, and, yeah, it can be scary, but I have an old house here in Rehoboth, so it's probably more important that I am here during a storm than anywhere."

*With reporting from NPR's Jon Hamilton and Phil Lutzman of member station WLRN, and content from The Associated Press*

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Recent First



**Charles Gillard (shylove)** wrote:

I think Mother Nature has Washington DC in her sites lately...

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 6:30:42 PM

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**Allison Sidders (AliLou)** wrote:

...and, my parents, other fam & many friends live there now, which is why I am VERY interested in Earl's path.

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 5:24:39 PM

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**Allison Sidders (AliLou)** wrote:

Chris, thanks for the info, but I lived in New Hanover County when Fran hit - and I sat in my dark, hot house for 7 days afterward with no power. Fun time, let me tell you. I also lived there for Bonnie, Bertha, Floyd, etc, etc. When I said I've been through many a cane, I wan't joking.

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 5:05:12 PM

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**Sven B. H. Manguard (Underwhelmed\_One)** wrote:

I spent enough time in Miami to know the golden rule of hurricanes is that the most dangerous one is the one you aren't prepared for.

Category 5 hurricanes like Andrew in 1992 are famous for their damage, however a category 1 hurricane can dump enough water on an area to cause highly damaging floods. In Miami, which is built on limestone and has awful natural draining, a rainy Cat 1 will do more damage than a windy Cat 4 (after Andrew, Florida went for serious building codes, which work to keep

damage low.)

For those worried about the Hurricane Season:

The likelihood of losing a house is low, the likelihood (especially in Florida Power and Light or other monopoly power company territories) of losing power is high. Make sure you can boil water and have batteries and lanterns.

Your local or state government will have guides, and NPR has wonderful crank radios for sale for when you lose power and want to hear what's going on.

Finally, the ultimate safety tip: "Don't do anything stupid."

That means no hurricane parties, and if the police want you to evacuate, its probably for a reason.

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 4:30:33 PM

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**Chris Woodson (CWinNC)** wrote:

Allison...I wouldn't necessarily underestimate even a Cat 3 or strong Cat 2. Hurricane Fran (1996) peeled the roofs off houses like a can-opener, uprooted trees, tore down power lines, flooded houses with 4 - 5 ft. of water. New Hanover county (NC) looked like a combat zone for weeks. In spite of the lore, historically, the Outer Banks has mostly only had glancing blows, compared to places like Wilmington and Charleston

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 1:16:48 PM

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

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**Allison Sidders (AliLou)** wrote:

preston, it's probably b/c residents have usually had some experience with hurricanes while many visitors have not. FEMA has to be very careful about issuing evacuation orders, if they do it too much, residents become lackadaisical about heeding them.

I've been through many a cane, and for the most part, I wouldn't leave for a 2, 3 is on the borderline, and a 4 or above means get outta dodge. Earl isn't supposed to make landfall, so the eyewall should stay pretty far away. The Banx will see only the eastern side of the storm, so that's good. The NW quadrant is the strongest in a cane.

I think it's reasonable for officials to let residents make their own choice - it's not their first rodeo.

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 12:15:46 PM

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

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**Walt Boehme (Jenrale)** wrote:

We're on St Croix, USVI and up on a hill side 230 feet above sea level. And Earl was only a Cat 2 hurricane when it went by about 80 miles to the North. Let me tell ya, if I was only 2 - 3 feet above sea level, I'd be outta there, pronto. Never mind the tidal surge, the dang waves were 12 feet high!!

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 11:34:50 AM

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

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**Norm Samuelson (plasticmodeler)** wrote:

The comments show a real lack of knowledge of hurricanes and the Outer Banks, and the projection of this storm. Bankers have very real firsthand experience with weathering these storms. The projected storm route shows the storm just brushing the Outer Banks. The Banks are nothing like NOLA, as they are above sea level (though only 2 or 3 feet above sea level, they are significantly higher than NOLA). The Banks are also flat sand, which allows the tide to wash across and then run back out to sea, not flooding the area for days or weeks. As in

any of these storms and the warnings, the residents are strongly encouraged to leave, and are told in no uncertain terms that they stay at their own risk. If they stay, they must leave next-of-kin information in the event of the worst happening. And obviously, vacationers should not stay and try to weather the storm because of their lack of preparation and storm knowledge. Please understand that I do not condone trying to weather the storm, but I do understand the residents wishing to stay and look after their property.

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 11:13:10 AM

[Recommend \(9\)](#)

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**Preston Pendergraft (gliding262)** wrote:

Why do the residents not have to heed the order? Is it a property rights issue?

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 10:14:39 AM

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

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**H. R III (Standtease)** wrote:

"The 800 or so year-round residents don't have to heed it, but Emergency Services Director Lindsey Mooney said officials hope they'll follow tourists on the 2½ hour trip to shore."

Bets on how many people will stay and force the government to save them because of their foolishness? Katrina anyone...

Wednesday, September 01, 2010 7:58:38 AM

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