

Florida applies lessons taught by Andrew to Opal's wake

■ **HURRICANE:** Rescue teams began searching for victims and cleaning up disaster area

NAVARRE BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The painful lessons of Hurricane Andrew three years ago made life easier for those in Opal's recent wake.

Beachfront residents in the Florida Panhandle evacuated en masse after being warned that Opal could grow as strong as Andrew, which flattened sections of southern Florida in 1992.

Some of the nation's elite rescue workers arrived even before Opal and began searching for victims last Thursday, the morning after the storm subsided.

Power has been restored steadily.

Relief centers with food and water were set up promptly. Price gougers were subject to a state crackdown.

"For a disaster, it went pretty smoothly," said Leon Brown, a businessman in Destin who lost the top floor of his glass company to the hurricane.

While damage was estimated at almost \$2 billion in insured losses — the nation's third-costliest storm, behind Hugo in 1989 and Andrew — no one was found dead or injured on Florida's barrier islands, which officials credited to the

evacuation.

Opal claimed two victims in Florida, one from an inland tornado and the other from a cleanup accident, and 20 victims overall in the South, plus 10 in Mexico.

In contrast, said Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay, "Andrew was a disaster in every sense. Our effort to respond was a disaster."

Andrew caused \$17 billion in insured losses, killed 55 in the United States and the Bahamas — 41 of them in Florida — and brought extended chaos and misery that exposed the inadequacy of government response plans.

Many people living along the beach had refused to leave, and others fled to the southwestern Dade suburbs, where Andrew leveled homes and businesses.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency took four days to start helping Dade County, which was reeling with a quarter-million homeless people and plagued by looting and roving gunmen.

Kate Hale, Dade County emergency director at the time, demanded to know, "Where the hell is the cavalry?"

An overhaul of FEMA procedures since then has allowed the agency to respond immediately to potential disasters rather than waiting for a formal request.

State officials also streamlined preparations, preparing backup communication systems, activating the National Guard and increasing communication with federal and local agencies before the hurricane hit.

"Andrew changed things dramatically for the state. Everyone is now organized as to their exact job and area of responsibility," Jo Miglino, spokeswoman for the state Division of Emergency Management, said. "It's much more of a team."

This time, as Opal closed in, 100,000 residents fled inland ahead of the hurricane's 125 mph sustained winds, gusts up to 145 mph and a tidal surge of 15 feet. Many evacuees recalled Andrew's 145 mph sustained winds and 200 mph microbursts.

"People were motivated by what Andrew had done," Brown said. He and his wife, Paula, drove in crawling traffic to Georgia.

Teams of select rescue workers, coordinated by FEMA, began searching destroyed homes and condo complexes on the narrow barrier islands the morning after the storm.

The rescue workers, drawn from many of the nation's largest cities, found a dozen dazed residents who had ridden

out the hurricane in their battered homes on Okaloosa Island.

FEMA has been noted for its aggressive handling of several recent disasters, including the Oklahoma City bombing, under Director James Lee Witt.

Bruce Baughman, FEMA operations chief, said that since Andrew, the agency tries to anticipate a state's needs and has a communication network, agency representatives and search teams ready the moment the state calls.

Opal raised some different questions: how to handle traffic gridlock when thousands of Panhandle residents evacuate northward; how much beach development and rebuilding to allow; and how to handle increasing pressure on Florida's property insurance industry.

Smaller communities in Walton and Gulf counties complained they were not getting as much help as more populated areas. But most agreed the first stages were handled smoothly.

"FEMA definitely got its act together," Destin Fire Chief Tuffy Dixon said. "We got excellent help from the federal, state and local emergency people this time. These are lessons learned totally from Andrew."

Disposable lenses linked to infections

■ **CONTACTS:** Researchers discover health risks of long-term usage

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Disposable contact lenses are causing thousands of serious eye infections each year despite manufacturers' claims that they are safer than reusable lenses, researchers said Monday.

Overnight use of contact lenses has been associated with an increased risk of infections.

Disposable lenses were introduced with the idea that they would reduce the opportunities for bacterial contamination, because they wouldn't be handled as much and wouldn't be stored in solutions that could harbor germs.

"That idea was simple, easy and wrong," Dr. H. Dwight Cavanagh, a professor of ophthalmology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, said.

Speaking at a seminar sponsored by Research to Prevent Blindness, a voluntary organiza-

tion, Cavanagh said, "The implication now in mass marketing of disposable lenses is that these things are safe — game over, time out, totally safe. That's not true."

Cavanagh stressed that the risk of infections with any contact lens is small. As many as 40 million people in the United States wear contact lenses, but lenses account for only about half the 27,000 corneal infections seen yearly in the country, he said.

Nearly all American contact-lens wearers wear soft contact lenses, and about 4 to 5 million Americans wear disposable lenses, Cavanagh said. Those who wear their lenses overnight have a risk of eye infection ten to fifteen times that of users who insert and remove their lenses daily, he said.

That contradicts the belief of some that the problem is that patients aren't using their lenses properly, said Dr. Oliver Schein, an ophthalmologist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

"If you wear it overnight, you buy the risk," he said.

Tim Comstock of Bausch &

Lomb, one of the nation's largest manufacturers of contact lenses, said the company had not made any special claims for the safety of disposable lenses other than to say they are cleaner and fresher than reusable lenses.

Comstock, the manager of Bausch & Lomb's research clinic in Rochester, N.Y., agreed that overnight use is connected with an increased risk of infection.

Cavanagh's most recent research has shown that the increased risk of infection occurs because extended-wear soft contact lenses, disposable or not, do not allow enough oxygen to reach the surface of the cornea.

That damages the surface of the cornea, giving bacteria an opportunity to invade, he said.

Experimental soft contact lenses that allow more oxygen to penetrate to the cornea may be available some time next year, Cavanagh said.

Hard contact lenses already allow more oxygen to reach the cornea, and they are associated with a much lower risk of eye infection, Cavanagh said.

Two Americans, German win Nobel Prize for study of genes

■ **MEDICINE:** Nobel prize-winning research should help explain some birth defects and miscarriages

Two Americans and a German won the Nobel Prize for medicine on Monday for studies of how genes control early embryo development — research that should help explain some birth defects and miscarriages.

Working with fruit flies, the three scientists identified genes that do the very earliest organizing to create a body and investigated how genetic master switches later produce specialized features like wings and legs.

The principles they found also apply to people, and counterparts of the fruit fly genes have been found in humans.

The winners are Edward B. Lewis, 77, at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Calif.; Eric F. Wieschaus, 48, of Princeton University; and Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard, 52, at the Max-Planck Institute for Developmental Biology in Tuebingen, Germany.

They will share the prize, worth \$1 million this year, and will be honored Dec. 10 at a ceremony in Stockholm.

Nüsslein-Volhard and Wieschaus worked together and first published their results in 1980.

In people, flaws in the kinds of genes the scientists studied are probably responsible for some early miscarriages and some of the roughly 40 percent of birth defects for which no cause is known, the Nobel citation said.

Without understanding the human versions of the genes the prizewinners studied and the way they work together, "I don't know how you'd ever understand birth defects," said Dr. Donald Brown, staff member of the embryology department at the Carnegie Institute of Washington in Baltimore.

Their research could also help improve in vitro fertilization and knowledge of substances that can endanger an early pregnancy, such as vitamin A, said Dr. Anita Apenia, a member of the Nobel committee at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

"It's tremendously important work, it's absolutely fundamental," said Philip Beachy, associate professor in the department of molecular biology and genetics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and an assistant investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

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For more information about these meetings, please contact
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