



AP Photo/Chuck Burton



AP Photo/David Goldman

Left: Sand bags surround homes on North Topsail Beach, N.C., Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2018, as Hurricane Florence threatens the coast. Right: Marge Brown, 65, says goodbye to her father, George Brown, 90, before he is evacuated from a healthcare home in Morehead City, N.C., Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2018, as Hurricane Florence approaches the east coast. "I'd like to stay and see what happens. I'm 90 plus," said Brown, a WWII veteran who says he's survived a plane crash and severe burns from a laboratory fire where he once worked.

Storm's uncertain track sows fear; 10 million in crosshairs

By JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. (AP) — Hurricane Florence put a corridor of more than 10 million people in the crosshairs Wednesday as the monster storm closed in on the Carolinas, uncertainty over its projected path spreading worry across a widening swath of the Southeast.

Faced with new forecasts that showed a more southerly threat, Georgia's governor joined his counterparts in Virginia and North and South Carolina in declaring a state of emergency, and some residents who had thought they were safely out of range boarded up their homes.

The National Hurricane Center's best guess was that Florence would blow ashore as early as Friday afternoon around the North Carolina-South Carolina line, then push its rainy way westward with a potential for catastrophic inland flooding.

Florence's nighttime winds were down to 115 mph (185 kph) from a high of 140 mph (225 kph), and the Category 4 storm fell to a Category 3, with a further slow weakening expected as the storm nears the coast. But authorities warned it will still be an extremely dangerous hurricane.

"Do you want to get hit with a train or do you want to get hit with a cement truck?" said Jeff Byard, an administrator with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Tropical storm-force winds extended 195 miles (315 kilometers) from Florence's center, and hurricane-force winds reached out 70 miles (110 kilometers).

The National Weather Service said 5.25 million people live in areas under hurricane warnings or watches, and 4.9 million live in places covered by tropical storm warnings or watches.

At the White House, President Donald Trump both touted the government's readiness and urged people to get out of the way of Florence.

"Don't play games with it. It's a big one," he said.

As of 8 p.m., the storm was centered 335 miles (540 kilometers) southeast of Wilmington, North Carolina, moving northwest at 16 mph (26 kph). The hurricane center said Florence will approach the coast Friday and linger for a while before rolling ashore.

As of Tuesday, more than 1.7 million people in the Carolinas and Virginia were warned to clear out. Airlines had canceled nearly 1,000 flights and counting. Home Depot and Lowe's activated emergency response centers to get generators, trash bags and bottled water to stores

Trump comments sting in Puerto Rico amid slow storm recovery on island

By DANICA COTO AND ANGELIKI KASTANIS
Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — President Donald Trump's assertion that the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria was "an incredible, unsung success" fell flat in Puerto Rico, where islanders are still struggling to recover from the devastating storm a year later.

"I was indignant," said Gloria Rosado, a 62-year-old college professor who watched the president's news conference on TV late Tuesday from San Juan and was still fuming the next day. "The image of my dead husband immediately came to my mind ... as well as all the lives that were lost."

Rosado's husband, who was hospitalized for respiratory and renal complications and ultimately suffered a heart attack, was one of the estimated 2,975 people who died in the Category 4 storm's aftermath when medical resources were strained beyond the breaking point.

For many, Trump's boast about "one of the best jobs that's ever been done" was hard to square with their daily reality: Blackouts remain common; nearly 60,000 homes are covered by only a makeshift roof not capable of withstanding a Category 1 hurricane; and 13 percent of municipalities lack stable phone or internet service.

"Nobody is singing his praises because we all saw what happened," San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz told The Associated Press. "He wasn't up to the task...and the way that he neglected our lives gave permission to other people in his administration to look the other way."

Cruz criticized Trump in a series of tweets, including one that said, "If he thinks the death of 3,000 people (is) a success God help us all."

That reignited a long-standing feud between



AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, File

In this Sept. 26, 2017 file photo, Nestor Serrano walks on the upstairs floor of his home, where the walls were blown off, in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico. Blackouts remain common, and nearly 60,000 homes have only a makeshift roof.

the mayor and Trump, who fired back calling her "totally incompetent" and saying the U.S. government "did an unappreciated great job in Puerto Rico."

A July report by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, noted several shortcomings in its response, including that it underestimated how much food and water would be needed after the storm and that not enough Spanish-speaking aid workers were deployed to the island.

At the same time, the agency also faced challenges that were arguably beyond its control such as the sheer force of the monster storm and the logistical difficulties of reaching the Caribbean island over a thousand miles (1,600 kilometers) away from the mainland.

And many residents say local officials share much of the blame. Puerto Rico's government has acknowledged that its emergency plans were designed for a Category 1 hurricane, as well as failures to follow those plans and communications breakdowns.

Ramon Ruiz, a 56-year-old business owner whose father died from heart problems on Thanksgiving after riding out the hurricane alone at home, pressed up against the door to keep it from caving in, is among those who say both local and federal authorities were slow to act.

"If it wasn't for the

churches and private organizations, we truly would not have received help from anyone," Ruiz said. "They are treating us like second-class citizens. ... If we were another state, the response would have been much faster."

In Maria's aftermath, according to FEMA data analyzed by the AP, approvals for individual assistance checks in Puerto Rico were slower compared with what happened with large storms last year. From Sept. 30 to Oct. 7, not one of those checks was approved. On Oct. 8 the approvals began rolling again, but with a large spike suggesting a backlog.

In addition, data from the U.S. Small Business Administration indicate that approvals for disaster loans in Puerto Rico were slow — the first one was not approved until 15 days after the storm was declared, four times as long as with Hurricane Harvey.

For Maria, there was a large gap between when the first loan was approved and when loans started ramping up. While 25 percent of Harvey loans were OKed within 42 days, for Maria, that didn't happen until Jan. 9, more than three months after the storm hit.

Overall, compared with Harvey and Irma, Maria saw more funds loaned to homeowners rather than business owners.

Islanders have also been angered by recent discoveries of supplies that never got delivered. A

photo that emerged Tuesday of thousands of water bottles abandoned on a runway in eastern Puerto Rico prompted local officials to say Wednesday that they were opening an investigation.

Ottmar Chavez, the new secretary of the island's General Services Administration, said at a news conference that Puerto Rican officials requested the water from the U.S. government and were supposed to pick it up in late May. He said some of it was distributed but people complained that it smelled bad. He added that it was unclear why the remainder sat on the runway for nearly four months.

Shortly after Maria hit last year, Trump visited Puerto Rico and was widely criticized for tossing paper towels to storm victims in a manner seen by many as insensitive to the scope of the disaster.

His latest remarks once again dredged up those same hurt feelings.

"I ignore them because none of them make sense," said Michelle Cruz, a 48-year-old airline worker whose mother died in December from septicemia after contracting an infection in a hospital during surgery after Maria. "It bothers me and it hurts. But I don't pay attention to him."

Data journalist Angeliki Kastanis reported from Los Angeles. Videographer Chris Gillette contributed to this report.

The shift in the projected track spread concern to areas that once thought they were relatively safe. In South Carolina, close to the Georgia line, Beaufort County emergency chief Neil Baxley told residents they need to prepare again for the worst just in case.

"We've had our lessons. Now it might be time for the exam," he said.

In Virginia, where about 245,000 residents were ordered to evacuate low-lying areas, officials urged people to remain away from home despite forecast changes showing Florence's path largely missing the state.

Their entire neighborhood evacuated in Wilmington, North Carolina, David and Janelle Garrigus planned to ride out Florence at their daughter's one-bedroom apartment in Charlotte. Unsure of what they might find when they return home, the couple went shopping for a recreational vehicle.

"We're just trying to plan for the future here, not having a house for an extended period of time," David Garrigus said.

Melody Rawson evacuated her first-floor apartment in Myrtle Beach and arrived at Atlanta Motor Speedway in Hampton, Georgia, to camp for free with three other adults, her disabled son, two dogs and a pet bird.

"We hope to have something left when we get home," she said.

Forecasters worried the storm's damage will be all the worse if it lingers on the coast. The trend is "exceptionally bad news," said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy, since it "smears a landfall out over hundreds of miles of coastline, most notably the storm surge."

With South Carolina's beach towns more in the bull's-eye because of the shifting forecast, Ohio vacationers Chris and Nicole Roland put off their departure from North Myrtle Beach to get the maximum amount of time on the sand. Most other beachgoers were long gone.

"It's been really nice," Nicole Roland said. "Also, a little creepy. You feel like you should have already left."

Associated Press writers Seth Borenstein in Washington; Jonathan Drew in Wilmington, North Carolina; Jennifer Kay in Miami; Gary Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina; Sarah Rankin and Denise Lavoie in Richmond, Virginia; Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina; Skip Foreman in Charlotte, North Carolina; Jeff Martin in Hampton, Georgia; David Koenig in Dallas; and Jay Reeves in Atlanta contributed to this report.

EARTHLINK INTERNET
HIGH SPEED INTERNET

Get Connected for as low as **14.95/mo.**
Get Connected for as low as **\$4.99/mo.**

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL AUTHORIZED RETAILER
855-977-9436

HyperLink™ High-Speed Internet
Satellite Internet

Authorized Dealer
EarthLink

Imagine The Difference You Can Make
DONATE YOUR CAR
1-844-533-9173

FREE TOWING
TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Help Prevent Blindness
Get A Vision Screening Annually

Heritage for the Blind

Ask About A FREE 3 Day Vacation Voucher To Over 20 Destinations!!!

DENTAL Insurance
Physicians Mutual Insurance Company

A less expensive way to help get the dental care you deserve

- If you're over 50, you can get coverage for about \$1 a day!
- Keep your own dentist! You can go to any dentist you want.
- NO annual or lifetime cap on the cash benefits you can receive.
- No wait for preventive care and no deductibles - you could get a checkup tomorrow.
- Coverage for over 350 procedures including cleanings, exams, fillings, crowns...even dentures.

FREE Information Kit
1-877-599-0125
Or www.dental50plus.com/25

*Individual plan. Product not available in MN, MT, NH, NM, RI, VT, WA. Accidents guaranteed for one insurance policy/contract of this type. Contact us for complete details about this insurance solicitation. This specific offer is not available in CO, NY, or for similar offer. Certificate C250A (ID, C250E, PA, C250D), Insurance Policy P150 (GA, P150GA, NY, P150NY; OK, P150OK; TN, P150TN) 6096E-0917 MB17-1M009E-C