

Hurricane blamed for 16 deaths in Florida alone

By JAY REEVES
Associated Press

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Hurricane Michael killed at least 16 people in Florida, most of them in the coastal county that took a direct hit from the storm, state emergency authorities said Tuesday. That’s in addition to at least 10 deaths elsewhere across the South.

The scope of the storm’s fury became clearer after nearly a week of missing-persons reports and desperate searches of the Florida Panhandle neighborhoods devastated by the most powerful hurricane to hit the continental U.S. in nearly 50 years.

The count of 16 dead was twice the number previously tallied by The Associated Press.

Emergency authorities said 12 of the deaths were in Bay County, where the storm slammed ashore with 155 mph winds and towering storm surge last Wednesday.

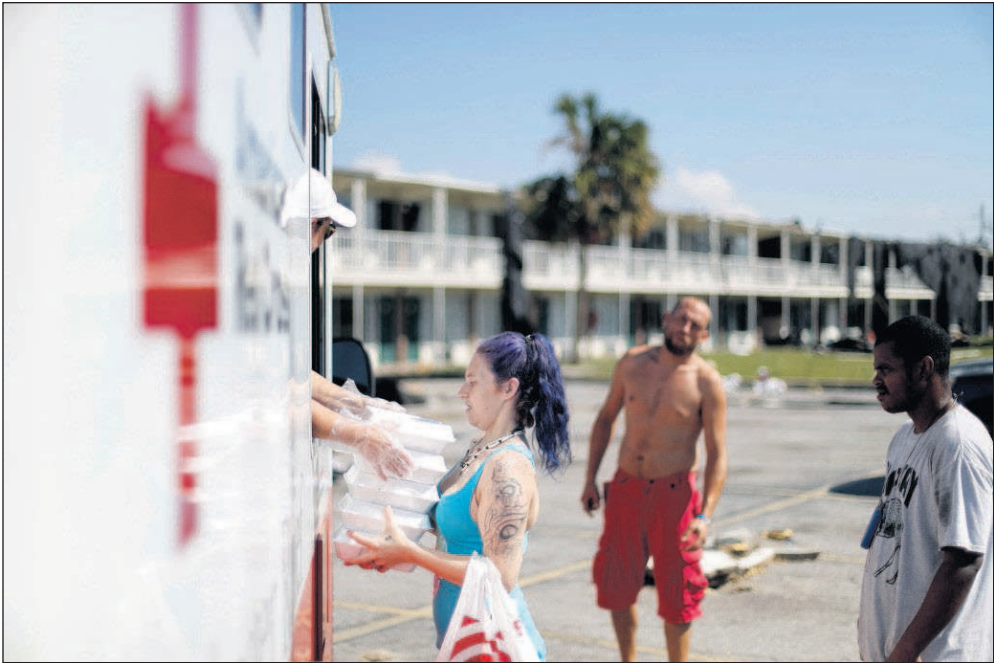
Bay County includes Mexico Beach, the ground-zero town of 1,000 people that was nearly obliterated, as well as Tyndall Air Force Base, Panama City and Lynn Haven, all of which were heavily damaged.

Florida emergency authorities gave no details on how the victims died.

The AP’s tally also includes 10 deaths in Virginia, Georgia and North Carolina.

Mexico Beach Mayor Al Cathey said two deaths were confirmed in his town, a man and a woman who did not evacuate and whose homes were destroyed.

Only one person remained missing in Mexico Beach, Cathey said, adding that authorities were almost certain that that person evacuated before Michael



Crystal Williams receives food from the Red Cross outside a damaged motel, Tuesday in Panama City, Fla., where many residents continue to live in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael.



Dena Frost salvages an unbroken clay pot from the wreckage of her pottery business in Mexico Beach, Fla.

and simply hasn’t been contacted.

“We’re holding steady at two and don’t expect that number to rise,” the mayor said.

Nearly 137,000 Florida customers remain without power in an 11-county region that stretches from the Gulf of Mexico to the Georgia border, according

to information compiled by state emergency management officials.

Meanwhile, a glimmer of hope emerged when cellphone service began to return to the stricken zone.

Cathey had a one-word exclamation when his Verizon phone started working for the first time in nearly a week: “Hallelujah!”

Verizon service also resumed in Panama City, where residents haven’t been able to contact loved ones or call for help. The telecommunications giant later announced it would give a three-month credit to every Verizon customer in Bay and Gulf counties.

Gov. Rick Scott had been criticizing phone companies over what he called a slow restoration of service.

Sitting outside in the sweltering heat in the Panama City area as she fanned herself with a flyswatter, Christy Tanksley said the sudden improvement in cell service was a huge relief.

“A lot of people didn’t even know we had evacuated and come back,” said Tanksley, whose phone runs off the Verizon network.

“I turned my phone on this morning and it started going crazy,” she said. “There were all kinds of messages, Facebook notifications, emails and emergency alerts.”



A Tustin, Calif., police officer looks over the debris of a car that was crushed by a 40-foot tall eucalyptus tree that snapped during high winds Monday. A woman inside the car was killed as she was backing out of a carport in Tustin.

California winds easing, wildfire risk narrowing

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California remained on guard Tuesday, but gusty winds that raised the threat of wildfires were decreasing in strength and becoming less widespread a day after knocking out power to thousands and forcing utilities to proactively cut electricity to prevent sparks.

Warnings for critical fire weather conditions were canceled for all but a stretch of the state’s southwest corner and part of the California-Oregon border, the National Weather Service said.

All warnings were expected to expire by evening. Meteorologists warned, however, that withering conditions would keep fire concerns elevated.

Many areas saw relative humidity levels fall into single-digit percentages as very dry air blew from the interior toward the coast, aggravating conditions in a state that the U.S. Drought Monitor shows is mostly in some stage of drought or at least abnormally dry.

Despite a weekend dousing of tropical moisture left over from former Hurricane Sergio, downtown Los Angeles has recorded less than half the rainfall it normally receives by this time of year.

Utilities, meanwhile reported progress in restoring electrical services to customers.

Pacific Gas & Electric said it expected to restore power Tuesday to the last of about 60,000 Northern California customers whose service was shut off Sunday night in a bid to prevent wildfires during blustery conditions. Most had service restored on Monday.

It was the first time PG&E pre-emptively cut power and came after authorities blamed its power lines for sparking some of California’s most destructive blazes. San Diego Gas & Electric also cut power briefly to a few hundred customers on Monday.

PG&E expects to pay billions of dollars in wildfire damages and has sought ways to limit its liability through the courts and legislature.

Southern California Edison, meanwhile, was working in the early afternoon to restore service to 14,300 customers, mostly in Riverside and Los Angeles counties, spokeswoman Susan Cox said. The utility had said it also might cut power to some areas but did not do so.

Trump tells AP he’s not to blame if Republicans lose the House

By CATHERINE LUCEY, JONATHAN LEMIRE AND ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facing the prospect of an electoral defeat that could imperil his presidency, President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he won’t accept the blame if Republicans lose the House in November, arguing that he is “helping” Republican candidates in the midterms.

In a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press, Trump also accused his longtime personal attorney Michael Cohen of “lying” under oath, defended his use of the derisive nickname “Horseface” for porn actress Stormy Daniels, and argued that the widespread condemnation of the Saudis in the disappearance of a *Washington Post* columnist was a rush to judgment.

Of his efforts on the campaign trail, Trump said: “I don’t believe anybody has ever had this kind of impact.” He resisted comparisons to former President Barack Obama, who took responsibility for the Democrats’ defeat in 2010 by acknowledging that his party got “shellacked.”

Democrats are hopeful about their chances to recapture the House, while Republicans are increasingly confident they can hold control of the Senate. If Democrats take the House and pursue impeachment or investigations — including seeking his long-hidden tax returns— Trump said he will “handle it very well.”

Trump fielded questions on array of topics, including his former attorney’s guilty plea in August. Cohen tes-



President Donald Trump speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday in Washington.

tified under oath that the president coordinated on a hush-money scheme to buy the silence of Daniels and a Playboy model who claims to have had an affair with Trump. The president on Tuesday declared the allegation “totally false.” But in entering the deal with Cohen, prosecutors signaled that they accepted his recitation of facts and account of what occurred.

Trump derided Cohen, who worked for Trump for a decade, as “a PR person who did small legal work,” and said it was “very sad” that Cohen had struck a deal to “achieve a lighter sentence.”

And Trump did not back down from derisively nicknaming Daniels “Horseface.”

Asked by the AP if it was appropriate to insult a woman’s appearance, Trump responded, “You can take it any way you want.”

Trump said that Washington lawyer Pat Cipollone will serve as his next White House counsel and

that he hoped to announce a replacement for U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley in the next week or two. He again repeated his frustration with Attorney General Jeff Sessions over the special counsel investigation, saying, “I can fire him whenever I want to fire him.”

On the ongoing Russia investigation, Trump defended his son Donald Trump Jr. for a Trump Tower meeting with a Kremlin-connected lawyer offering damaging information about Democrat Hillary Clinton. Trump called his son a “good young guy” and said he did what any political aide would have done.

Trump also touted the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh as helping to motivate GOP voters. Trump said he spoke to former President George W. Bush about Kavanaugh but, when asked by the AP, said he did not thank him for the calls he made to lobby GOP senators.

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