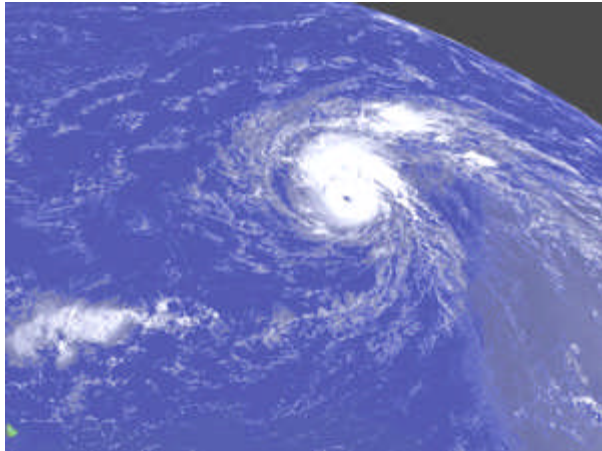


Hurricane Season Expected To Be Worse Than Usual

by Deborah Tedford



NOAA/AP

This satellite image provided by NOAA shows Hurricane Bertha collected at 6:45 a.m. on July 7, 2008. The 2010 hurricane season is expected to be more active than usual.

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This year's hurricane season is expected to be more active than usual, and communities along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts face a 69 percent risk of being buffeted by a major storm in the coming months, according to forecasters at Colorado State University.

Researchers said eight hurricanes and 15 named tropical storms are likely to form in the Atlantic basin during the 2010 hurricane season, which begins June 1 and extends through Nov. 30. Four of the storms are expected to develop into major hurricanes with sustained winds of 111 mph or greater.

The forecasting team based its predictions on weakening of El Nino conditions combined with abnormally strong warming of the tropical Atlantic waters.

"We believe that these two features will lead to favorable dynamic and thermodynamic conditions for hurricane formation and intensification," the team stated in an update of a report issued in December.

Led by pioneering forecaster William Gray, Colorado State University researchers have been forecasting hurricanes for 27 years. The team bases its predictions on historical data. The 2010 season shows similarities to conditions preceding the very active 1958, 1966, 1969, 1998 and 2005 hurricane seasons.

"While patterns may change before the start of hurricane season, we believe current conditions warrant concern for an above-average season," Gray said in a statement released Tuesday.

The team also predicted:

— A 45 percent chance that a major hurricane will make landfall on the East Coast of the U.S., including the Florida Peninsula.

— A 44 percent chance that a major hurricane will strike the Gulf Coast from the Florida Panhandle west to Brownsville, Texas.

That's bad news for a large swath of the Gulf Coast, where residents are still recovering from major hurricanes. Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and parts of Mississippi and Alabama in 2005; Hurricane Ike left much of Galveston, Texas, in ruins in 2008.

Galveston, an island city, is the site of the biggest natural disaster to ever hit the U.S.: In 1900, an unnamed hurricane racked the islands with 135 mph winds, killing at least 6,000 people.

Forecasters also predicted a 58 percent chance of a major hurricane tracking into the Caribbean, which means earthquake-stricken Haiti could be vulnerable.

The Jan. 12 earthquake killed more than 230,000 people and left more than 1 million homeless, the Haitian ambassador to the U.S., Raymond Alcide Joseph, said in a speech at Princeton University earlier this week.

The forecast will be updated two more times — on June 2, at the beginning of hurricane season, and on Aug. 4, at the midway point.

Hurricane forecasts are watched closely by coastal communities and commodities traders, who base trades on potential impact to offshore drilling.