

# Hurricane Florence: Powerful and relentless storm batters the Carolinas

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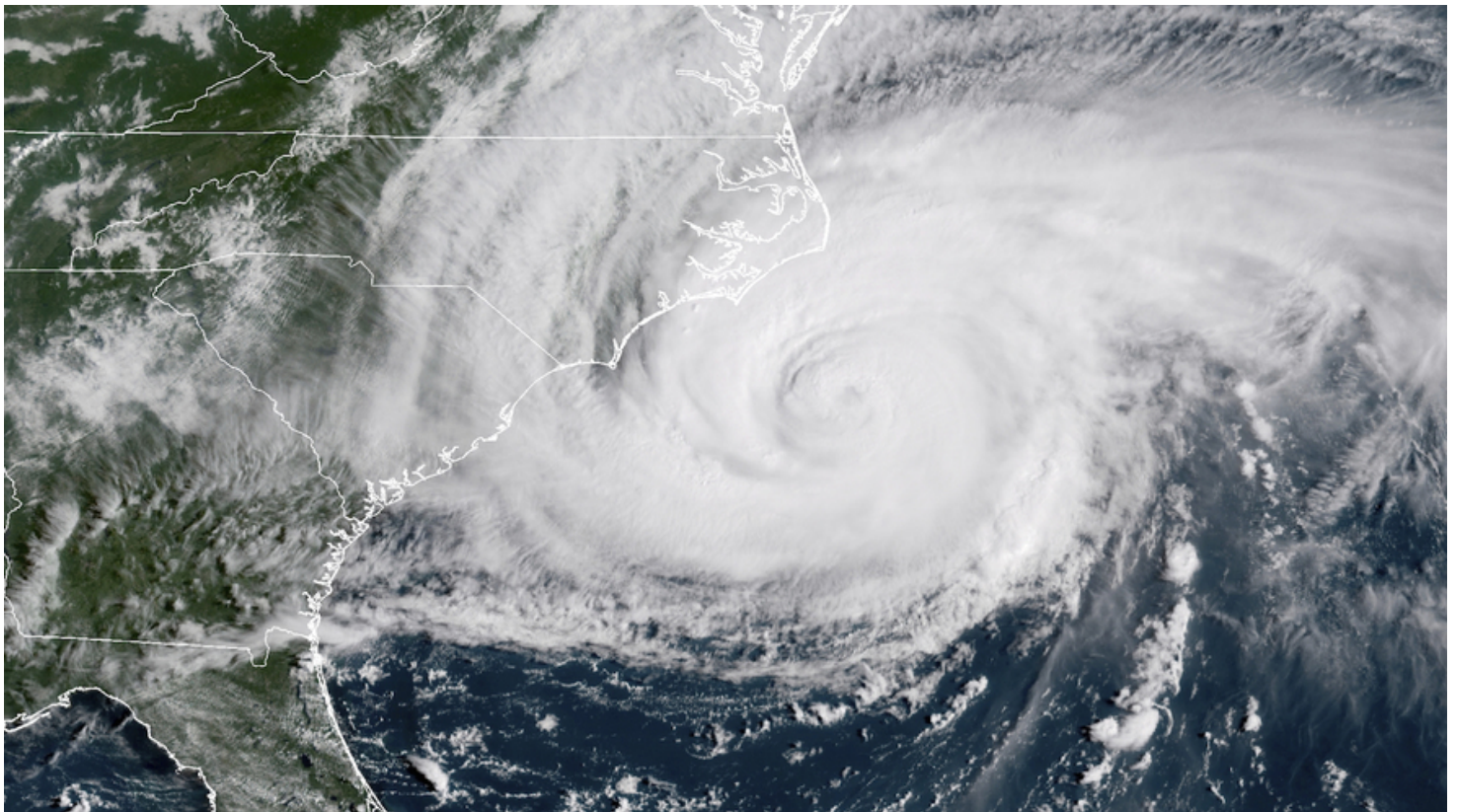


Image 1. This satellite image provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows Hurricane Florence on the eastern coast of the United States on September 14, 2018. Photo by: NOAA via AP

WILMINGTON, North Carolina — Hurricane Florence lumbered ashore in North Carolina early on Friday, September 14. Florence brought howling winds of 90 miles per hour (mph) that splintered buildings. The hurricane's storm surge, or rise in ocean level, also trapped hundreds of people in high water.

Experts said Florence could provide a long and extraordinarily destructive drenching. More than 60 people had to be pulled from a collapsing cinderblock motel at the height of the storm. Hundreds more had to be rescued elsewhere from rising waters.

## **"We Are Coming To Get You"**

Around 2 a.m. Friday the city of New Bern, North Carolina's Twitter account tweeted "WE ARE COMING TO GET YOU."

"You may need to move up to the second story, or to your attic, but WE ARE COMING TO GET YOU," they tweeted.

As Florence pounded away, it unloaded heavy rain, flattened trees and chewed away at roads. More than a half-million homes and businesses lost power.

Ominously, forecasters said the barrage on the North Carolina-South Carolina coast would last for hours. This is because the hurricane had come almost to a dead stop at just 3 mph by mid-Friday.

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper said the hurricane could wipe out entire communities as it makes its "violent grind across our state for days." He called the rain an event that comes along once every 1,000 years.

"Hurricane Florence is powerful, slow and relentless," he said. "It's an uninvited brute who doesn't want to leave."

As of Sunday afternoon, 17 people had been reported as dead.



### **Boarded-Up, Emptied-Out Coastline**

Florence made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane at 7:15 a.m. at Wrightsville Beach. The beach is a few miles east of Wilmington, North Carolina, which is close to South Carolina. The hurricane came ashore along a mostly boarded-up, emptied-out coastline. A Category 1 hurricane has the lowest level of wind, with speeds between 74 and 95 mph.

Still, Florence's storm surge and the possibility of 1 to 3½ feet of rain were now considered bigger threats than its winds. Earlier last week, Florence had been classified as a Category 4 hurricane. Winds had reached an alarming 140 mph before weakening as it got closer. Forecasters said devastating freshwater flooding was expected far into the inland over the weekend as Florence kept crawling west across the Carolinas.

The area was expected to get about as much rain in three days as Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd dropped in two weeks in 1999. Emergency workers prepared for the worst. About 9,700 National Guard troops and civilians were sent out with high-water vehicles, helicopters and boats to grab people from the floodwaters.

### **Flash Flooding Big Danger**

For people living inland in the Carolinas, the moment of maximum danger from flash flooding could arrive days later. It takes time for rainwater to drain into rivers and for those streams to rise. Authorities warned, too, of the threat of mudslides. There are also environmental risks from floodwaters washing over industrial waste sites and hog farms. The waters could pick up and spread harmful materials.

Florence was seen as a major test for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It is a national government group that helps cities and states with emergencies. FEMA was heavily criticized as slow and unprepared to help when Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico last year.

Hurricane Maria was blamed for nearly 3,000 deaths in Puerto Rico.

Florence is expected to dump about 18 trillion gallons of rain over a week along its entire path. Ryan Maue is a meteorologist for weathermodels.com. Maue said that amount could fill more than 65,000 Empire State Buildings.

### **Pieces Of Buildings Fly Through Air**

On Friday, coastal streets in the Carolinas flowed with frothy ocean water, and pieces of torn-apart buildings flew through the air. The few cars on a main street in Wilmington swerved to avoid fallen trees, metal garbage and power lines. Traffic lights without power swayed in the gusty wind, and roof shingles peeled off a hotel.

At 11 a.m., the center of Florence was about 20 miles southwest of Wilmington, its winds down to 80 mph, according to the National Hurricane Center. Hurricane-force winds extended 80 miles from Florence's center, and tropical-storm-force winds reached out 195 miles. Force winds are the pressure exerted by a wind.

The Wilmington airport had a wind gust clocked at 105 mph. That mark was the highest since Hurricane Helene in 1958, the weather service said.

In Jacksonville, North Carolina, firefighters and police fought wind and rain as they went door-to-door to pull people out of the Triangle Motor Inn. The structure began crumbling and the roof started to collapse.

Farther up the coast, in New Bern, flooding on the Neuse River trapped people. Mayor Dana Outlaw said about 200 had been rescued by 5 a.m. Friday.

Sheets of rain splattered against a hotel's windows before daybreak in Wilmington. Sandie Orsa sat in the hotel lobby lit by emergency lights after losing electricity.

"Very eerie, the wind howling, the rain blowing sideways, debris flying," said Orsa. She lives nearby and feared splintering trees would pummel her house.

Forecasters said Florence's surge could cover all but a sliver of the Carolina coast. The sea water could reach 11 feet high.

More than 12,000 people went to shelters in North Carolina. Officials said 1.7 million people in the Carolinas and Virginia were warned to leave their homes, but it was unclear how many did. More than 3,000 prisoners were moved out of the storm's path in North Carolina.

