

Florida Smote by 'Stealth' Storm

Posted by

Friday, 26 August 2005 10:36 - Last Updated Friday, 26 August 2005 10:36

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PEJ News - C. L. Cook - In a record year of tropical storm warnings, many in southern Florida took the approaching tropical storm Katrina casually. But, what came ashore, killing several people and wreaking havoc with the state's power grid, was no mild blow.

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*[http://www.redcross.org/
static/file_cont4466_lang0_1574.jpg](http://www.redcross.org/static/file_cont4466_lang0_1574.jpg)*

[with updates]

[Update I Sat. Aug. 27 8am pst] Katrina has been upgraded to a class 3 hurricane. It has returned to the Gulf of Mexico where it is [expected to grow in strength](#) before wheeling back towards the Florida panhandle Monday.

[Update II Sat. Aug. 27 10:41am pst] [Katrina, upgraded to class 4 hurricane](#) , is forecast to make landfall near the Louisiana-Mississippi border within the next 36 hours. Oil rigs laying in its path in the Gulf are on evacuation alert.

[Update III Sat. Aug 27 8:15 pdt] [Evacuations ordered](#) . New Orleans readies.

[Update IV Sun. Aug 28 09:11 pdt] [New Orleans Evacuation Ordered](#) .

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C. L. Cook

PEJ News

August 26, 2005

The storm now dubbed, "Little Andrew," in reference to the worst hurricane event in the state, has Floridians picking up the pieces, more than a million of them doing so in the dark, and asking, "How hurricane savvy locals could be taken by surprise?"

Many, [expecting tropical storm Katrina to come and go](#) as benignly as the ten T.S. category events preceding it this year, didn't bother to prepare. Jaded storm veterans, though well equipped with the usual disaster kits, failed to shutter homes, or secure outdoor material possessions. There were none of the familiar hardware store stampedes, or laying in of water and canned goods. What they didn't realize was, Katrina's pass over the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico magnified its power enough to upgrade it to an official hurricane; a hurricane heading straight for south Florida and its unofficial capital city, Miami and its three million inhabitants.

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For those in the city, receiving news of Katrina's promotion to Class 1 Hurricane status was not a big deal; the city survived Class 5 Andrew and its 200 mile an hour winds ruffled but unshaken. But, Katrina's nature was wholly different from the rampaging Andrew, that killed 67 and created more than 26 billion dollars worth of damage claims in 1992. This was a slow moving system, heavily laden with the oily waters of the Gulf. Where Andrew raced across the city and state, Katrina lingered, dumping more than twenty inches (50 centimeters) in just six hours.

The torrential rain and high wind brought down trees and power lines. Almost a third of Miami lost power. The National Hurricane Center in West Miami had a front row seat, Katrina's eye passing directly over their building. Said one scientist working in the building at the time; "We have monitored scores of hurricanes here, but never been this close."

In 1992, Hurricane Andrew tore off the building's storm shutters and forced its temporary evacuation.

Chris Cook hosts Gorilla Radio, a weekly public affairs program, [broad/webcast](#) from the University of Victoria, Canada. He also serves as contributing editor to PEJ News. You can check out the [GR Blog here.](#)