

‘It’s in full beast mode’: Category 4 Hurricane Laura surges toward landfall near Texas-Louisiana border

SABINE PASS, Texas — Hurricane Laura is expected to make landfall as an “extremely dangerous” Category 4 storm with “unsurvivable storm surge” on Wednesday night or early Thursday near the Texas-Louisiana border, the National Hurricane Center said.

There are possible tornadoes approaching southeastern Louisiana and extreme southwestern Mississippi, the hurricane center said in its 8 p.m. CDT update. The storm’s maximum sustained winds reached 150 mph, a “chilling” development, according to the hurricane center. That’s 7 mph away from being a Category 5 storm, according to the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.

“I think all evidence right now indicates that we’re probably going to be looking at a Category 5 storm,” said National Weather Service meteorologist Donald Jones.

On Twitter, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said he ordered the state to close the Interstate 10 eastbound at the Texas-Louisiana border and westbound west of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Hurricane Laura could bring 20-foot storm surge: Where is it, where will it be the worst?

Officials urged roughly 7,000 residents to evacuate from a coastal Louisiana parish that could be covered by ocean water when Laura makes landfall. But at least 150 people refused to leave, officials said.

“It’s a very sad situation,” Ashley Buller, assistant director of the parish Office of Emergency Preparedness, said. “We did everything we could to encourage them to leave.”

Edwards said: “They’re thinking Cameron Parish is going to look like an extension

of the Gulf of Mexico for a couple of days.”

Laura, which grew to a Category 4 storm Wednesday afternoon, is forecast to bring a “catastrophic” storm surge, “extreme winds and flash flooding to eastern Texas and Louisiana, according to the hurricane center. It was 75 miles south of Lake Charles, Louisiana, and 75 miles southeast of Port Arthur, Texas, at 10 p.m. CDT.

Water levels are forecast to rise quickly Wednesday evening and overnight due to storm surge and the tide, the hurricane center said.

The National Weather Service has urged people who have been ordered to evacuate to take shelter in sturdy structures in a room away from windows.

“Dangerous winds will last for hours in many locations tonight and/or tomorrow,” NWS tweeted.

Laura is the strongest August hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico since infamous Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Colorado State University meteorologist Phil Klotzbach said.

More than half a million people were ordered to evacuate as the storm approached, including the Texas cities of Beaumont, Galveston and Port Arthur.

“Hurricane Laura is a very dangerous and rapidly intensifying hurricane,” President Donald Trump tweeted on Wednesday afternoon. “My Administration remains fully engaged with state & local emergency managers to continue preparing and assisting the great people (of) Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas.”

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said Wednesday, “This is a tough storm – big, powerful, and every forecast seems to increase the intensity.”

Edwards has activated the entire Louisiana National Guard for Laura. Several refineries along the Gulf Coast have also shut down before the hurricane makes landfall.

‘Rapid intensification’ for Hurricane Laura: Here’s why that could be so dangerous

The storm intensified a “remarkable” amount in 24 hours, the hurricane center said. And Laura is growing: “Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 70 miles from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 175 miles,” forecasters said.

“It looks like it’s in full beast mode,” said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy. “Which is not what you want to see if you’re in its way.”

It’s the first major hurricane of the 2020 season.

“We are expecting widespread power outages, trees down. Homes and businesses will be damaged,” said Donald Jones, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Lake Charles. “I’m telling you, this is going to be a very serious situation.”

More:Fifteen years and \$15 billion since Katrina, New Orleans is more prepared for a major hurricane – for now

The hurricane center said parts of the Louisiana coast from Johnson Bayou to the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge could see waters rise as much as 20 feet from “the combination of a dangerous storm surge and the tide.”

Storm surge could reach as far as 30 miles inland from the coastline, the hurricane center said. “Actions to protect life and property should be rushed to completion as water levels will begin to rise later today.”

Edwards said he expects Interstate 10 in Lake Charles and beyond to go under water, hampering search-and-rescue efforts. “It will be inundated,” he said Wednesday.

First Rita, then Ike:Now the ‘resilient’ residents of this Texas town brace for Hurricane Laura.

Founded in the late 1800s, Sabine Pass has been smashed repeatedly in recent years, first by Rita in 2005, then Ike in 2008.



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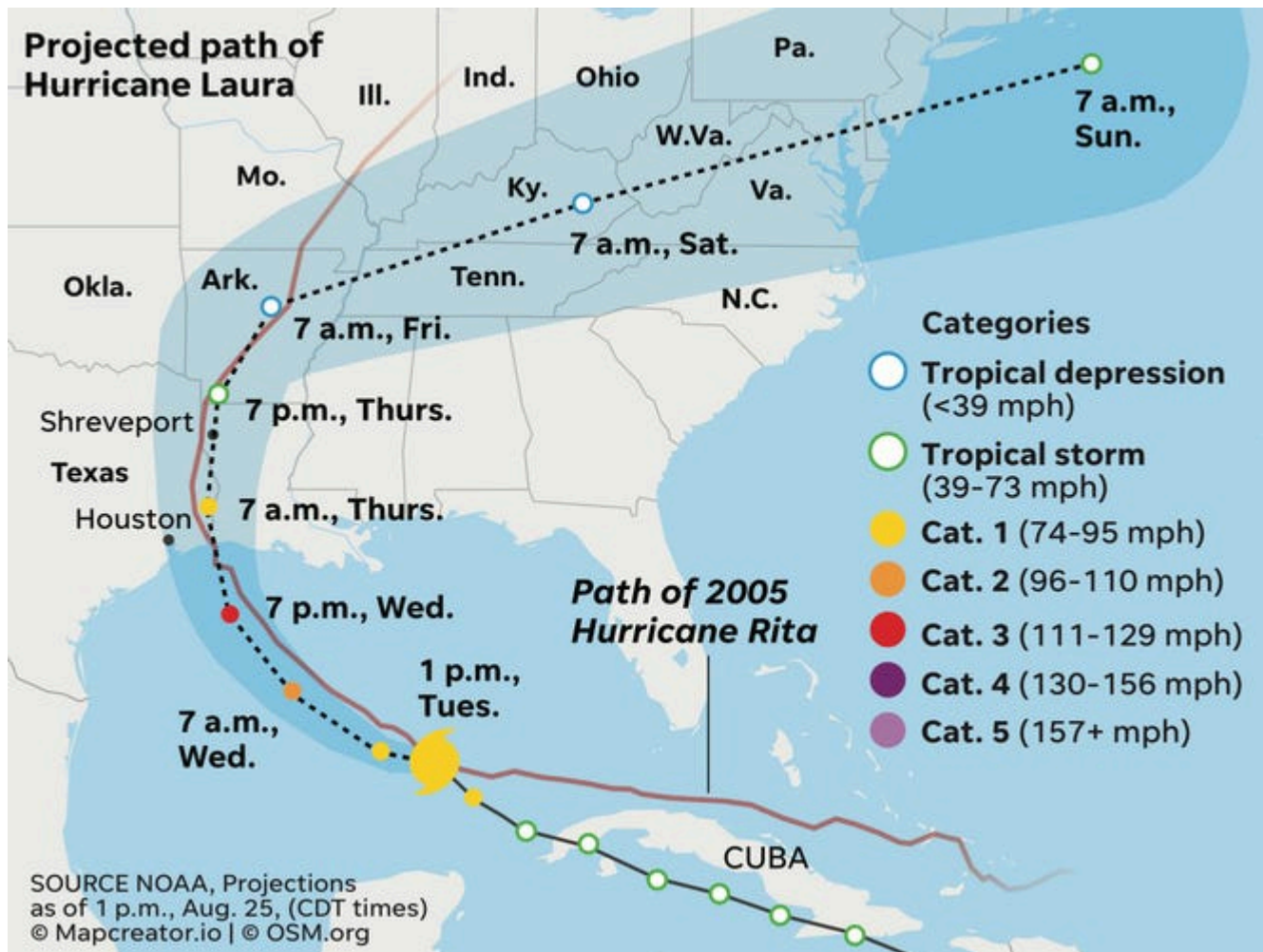
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The hurricane threatens a center of the U.S. energy industry. The government said 84% of Gulf oil production and 61% of natural gas production were shut down. Nearly 300 platforms have been evacuated.

After Laura makes landfall, the storm is expected to weaken rapidly as it makes its way north, then turns northeast.

The most recent major hurricane to make landfall in Texas was Harvey in 2017, which had 130-mph maximum winds, Klotzbach said. In Louisiana, it was Rita in 2005, with 115-mph maximum winds.

The Atlantic hurricane season has been a record-breaker. Laura is the earliest L-named storm in the Atlantic Basin, breaking a record held by Luis, which formed Aug. 29, 1995. This season has had 13 named storms, which is well above-normal activity.



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