

Status Report No: D-3

Hurricane Dennis

Date: 8th July 2005
Time: 09:00 UTC (05:00 EST)
Current Position: 20.7N 79.1W
Current Wind Speed: 132 mph (213 kph)
Current Forward Speed of storm: 16 mph (26 kph)
Current Pressure: 950 mb
Current Intensity Class: Category 4
Status: Strengthening



Summary

Hurricane Dennis is located approximately 275 miles (440 kilometres) south-east of Havana in Cuba and packs sustained winds of around 132 miles per hour (213 kilometres per hour), according to the National Hurricane Center (NHC). The storm is predicted to travel in a north-west direction and strengthen over the next 12 hours. Hurricane-force winds extend 50 miles (85 kilometres) from the centre of the storm, while tropical storm-force winds extend 140 miles (220 kilometres). Dennis is forecast to hit western Cuba later today before moving into the Gulf of Mexico (on a track that could take it over offshore oil platforms) and heading towards Florida and Alabama.

A hurricane warning has been issued for most of Cuba, including Havana, as well as Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. A hurricane warning has also been issued for the Lower Florida Keys while a tropical storm warning and a hurricane watch is in effect for the remainder of Florida Keys. Meanwhile, a tropical storm warning is in place along the Florida west coast south of Bonita Beach and along the Florida east coast south of Golden Beach.

Forecasters said between 5 to 10 inches (127 to 255 millimetres) of rain is expected to fall over Cuba, with maximum amounts of 15 inches (380 millimetres) possible over the Sierra Maestra Mountains of south-eastern Cuba. Rainfall of 4 to 8 inches (100 to 200 millimetres) is expected over southern Florida, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. The NHC said the torrential rain could trigger life-threatening flash floods and mudslides in these countries.

Around 200,000 people have been evacuated in Cuba, including more than 2,500 foreign tourists at the Cayo Largo beach resort. Cuban President Fidel Castro warned the hurricane was likely to cause considerable damage to the country. In the US, meanwhile, Florida Governor Jeb Bush warned that Dennis could cause a "major disaster" and a state of emergency has been declared. Dennis is expected to pass about 40 miles west of Key West on Saturday, prompting authorities to urge Florida Keys tourists to evacuate the area. Residents in exposed regions have also been urged to leave. Forecasters advised people from Louisiana to Florida to gather emergency supplies and plan for possible evacuations. They also cautioned that the storm could damage areas well inland.

Earlier, Dennis moved past the eastern tip of Jamaica Thursday afternoon, causing extensive flooding in the country. Although there have been no reports of deaths or widespread damage in Jamaica, the National Emergency Operations Center said many people were trapped by floodwaters. Heavy rain also hit the Dominican Republic and southern Haiti. Reports said four people were killed in Haiti when a bridge collapsed under pressure from a swollen river in the town of Grand Goave. Homes and roads in the south of the country were also flooded by up to 3 feet of water (90 centimetres), according to the Associated Press.

The NHC said Dennis is expected to make landfall along the Florida Panhandle near Pensacola on Sunday or Monday. The NHC has produced the following estimates (as of 0500 EST) of landfall probability within 65 nautical miles of the following cities from today to 0200 EST Monday:

1. Key West, Florida – probability of 48%
2. Marco Island, Florida – probability of 29%
3. Fort Myers, Florida – probability of 25%
4. Venice, Florida – probability of 25%
5. Tampa, Florida – probability of 20%

Sources: National Hurricane Center, Associated Press, Reuters News, BBC News, CNN News, AFX International Focus, Agence France Presse

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