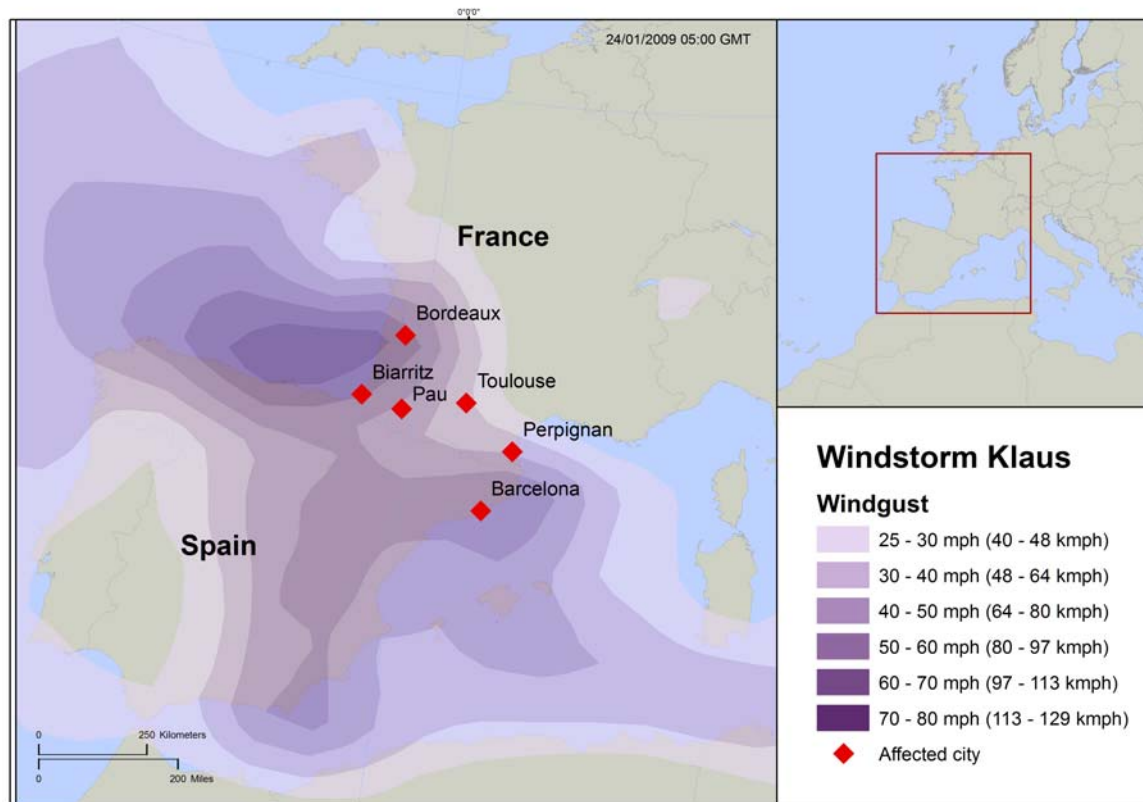


Report Date: 26 January 2009

Event Date: 23 – 24 January 2008

Windstorm Klaus



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Summary

Southern France and northwestern Spain were subjected to hurricane-force winds over the weekend, leaving a trail of destruction and disruption as cars were blown off roads, roofs were ripped off houses and trees were downed. The strong winds, combined with heavy rain, were the result of a deep low pressure system, named Windstorm Klaus. Reports state that at least 23 people were killed during the passage of the storm (14 in Spain and 9 in France), which caused damage from the Dordogne area to the Pyrenees.

Klaus moved across the Bay of Biscay on 23 January and into the Bordeaux region of France on 24 January, bringing powerful winds and torrential rain to southern France and northwestern Spain. Wind gusts of around 160 kmph (100 mph) were recorded in various locations across the region (with gusts reaching 184 kmph in the eastern Pyrenees near Perpignan). Klaus continued to track eastwards across southern France before moving into the Mediterranean Sea. Klaus’s path and damage extent drew comparisons with Windstorm Martin in 1999 that killed around 90 people in France and cut power to around 4 million households.

Météo France issued a red alert on 23 January that warned a windstorm was forecast to hit five departments in southwest France on 24 January (Landes, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Hautes-Pyrénées, Gers and Haute-Garonne). The forecast was for a storm of similar intensity to Windstorm Martin, but it was expected to affect a smaller geographical area. However, reports suggest Klaus affected a wider swath than had originally been forecast, causing damage across southern France and Spain's Catalonia and Galicia regions.

The impact of the storm was felt from the Channel Isles to Italy, but the strongest winds and heaviest rain were concentrated in France and Spain. Damage in southwestern regions of France and northern Spain has been severe, with reports of roof damage to property and extensive damage to the forestry industry. Forestry officials said hundreds of thousands of trees had been flattened by the storm in the Gironde and Landes departments. The Landes forest is reported to have sustained severe damage while the Gironde region in southwestern France has also seen vast forest areas flattened by the storm. Reports said other departments with property and tree damage included Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Hautes-Pyrénées, Gers, Haute-Garonne, Lot-et-Garonne, Aude and Pyrénées-Orientales.

At the height of the storm, 1.7 million households lost power in southern France and the electricity grid operator, ERDF, said engineers are currently trying to restore power to the 680,000 homes still without power. Five hundred back-up generators are being installed in affected towns and villages as more than 1,000 electricians, backed up by 12 helicopters surveying the damage, attempt to restore power to households, ERDF said.

All forms of transport in France were disrupted by the storm. Reports said services to France's railway network were badly affected as downed trees blocked 1,500 kilometres (900 miles) of tracks, leaving several hundred passengers stranded. Airports in the region, including Bordeaux, Pau, Biarritz, Toulouse and Perpignan airports were forced to close on 24 January but all had reopened by 25 January. Many roads were also blocked.

Klaus also caused significant damage across northern Spain, where at least 14 people were killed. In Sant Boi de Llobregat, near Barcelona, four children died when the metal roof and part of a wall of a sports complex collapsed inwards. Powerful winds gusting up to around 150 kmph (95 mph) and waves of up to 21.5 metres (70 feet) high along Spain's northern coast prompted officials to put much of the region on alert. Spain's electricity network operator, REE, said tens of thousands of people in the Galicia and Catalonia regions lost power. Some 50,000 Spanish homes remained without electricity on 26 January, with nearly three quarters of these in Galicia, authorities said. Elsewhere, forest fires broke out in Tarragona, Alicante and Valencia as downed electrical lines sparked the blazes which were subsequently fanned by the storm's high winds. Reports said around 15,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes, but the blazes were close to being contained on 26 January.

Sources: Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Reuters News, BBC News, CNN News, Platts Commodity News

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