



Hurricane, or Tropical Cyclone, Katrina struck the southeastern United States in late August 2005. The hurricane and its aftermath claimed more than 1,800 lives, and it ranked as the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

The storm began as a tropical depression over The Bahamas on August 23, 2005. Over the next two days it gathered strength, becoming a tropical storm that was named Katrina. It made landfall between Miami, Florida, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as a category 1 hurricane. Such hurricanes are capable of producing winds in the range of 74–95 miles per hour (119–154 kilometers per hour). Winds recorded at 70 miles per hour (115 kilometers per hour) whipped over Florida, and rainfall totals of 5 inches (13 centimeters) were reported in some areas. After less than eight hours over land, the storm moved off into the Gulf of Mexico, where it quickly intensified due to the warm waters.



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On August 27 Katrina strengthened to a category 3 hurricane (with winds capable of exceeding 115 miles per hour [185 kilometers per hour]) and covered nearly the entire Gulf of Mexico. By the following afternoon Katrina had become one of the most powerful Atlantic storms on record, with winds in excess of 170 miles per hour (275 kilometers per hour). On the morning of August 29, the storm made landfall as a category 4 hurricane at Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, approximately 45 miles (70 kilometers) southeast of New Orleans, Louisiana. It continued moving to the northeast, crossing the Mississippi Sound and hitting land a second time later that morning near the mouth of the Pearl River. A storm surge more than 26 feet (8 meters) high slammed into the coastal cities of Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi, destroying homes and resorts along the beachfront.

New Orleans, where much of the metropolitan area is below sea level, had been spared a direct hit. However, the levee system designed to hold back the waters of Lake

Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne failed after being inundated with 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain and Katrina's storm surge. Areas of the city began to flood. By the afternoon of August 29, some 20 percent of the city was underwater.



Paul Morse/The White House Paul Morse/The White House

A mandatory evacuation of New Orleans was ordered the previous day, and an estimated 1.2 million people left ahead of the storm. However, tens of thousands of residents either could not or would not leave. Some stayed in their homes while others sought shelter at the New Orleans Convention Center or the Louisiana Superdome. In the meantime, the levee system continued to give way, and by August 30 the city was 80 percent underwater. Many local agencies, with their own headquarters and control centers under 20 feet (6 meters) of water, were unable to respond to the dire situation. Without an organized effort to restore order in the city, looting became widespread.

The Red Cross set up a shelter at the Houston Astrodome, some 350 miles (560 kilometers) away from New Orleans. Although the first evacuees began to arrive on August 31, tens of thousands of people remained in the city. By September 1 an estimated 30,000 people had fled to the damaged Superdome, and an additional 25,000 had gathered at the Convention Center. Shortages of food and potable water quickly became an issue, and daily temperatures reached 90° F (32° C). A lack of basic sanitation as well as bacteria-laden floodwaters created a public health emergency.



U.S. Air Force U.S. Air Force

By September 2 an effective military presence was established in the city to restore order. National Guard troops also were used to distribute food and water. Hurricane victims were still being evacuated, and crews began to rebuild the breached levees. On September 6, local police estimated that there were fewer than 10,000 residents left in New Orleans. As the recovery began, dozens of countries contributed funds and supplies, and Canada and Mexico deployed troops to the Gulf Coast to assist with the cleanup and rebuilding. The last of the floodwaters were pumped out of the city on October 11, 2005, some 43 days after Katrina made landfall. Ultimately, the storm caused more than \$100 billion in damage, and it reduced the population of New Orleans to a fraction of its former size.