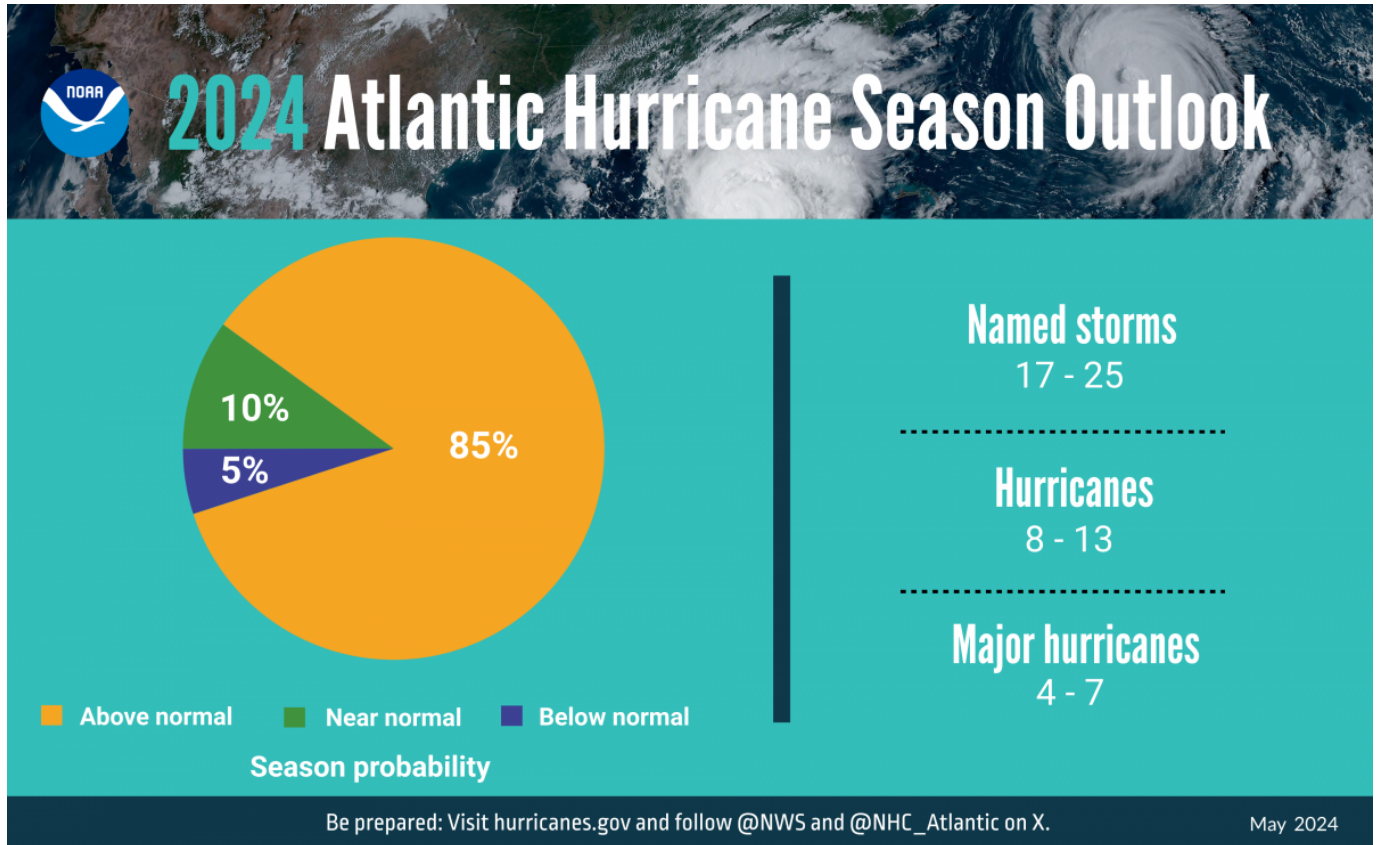




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Brace for hurricanes: In the U.S., 'on your own;' in Cuba, ready & united

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A summary infographic showing hurricane season probability and numbers of named storms predicted from NOAA's 2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook. Image: NOAA

New Orleans — The 2024 Atlantic hurricane season officially began on June 1, and meteorologists expect a bad one. Record ocean temperatures associated with climate change, combined with La Niña conditions, have led the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to issue its most dire warnings on record.

They anticipate 17-25 named storms, with 8-13 of those growing into hurricanes with wind speeds of at least 74 mph. This comes on the heels of last year's record-shattering heat, drought, and fire conditions that affected even the normally damp Gulf Coast just as they did the western U.S.

When people meet here in Louisiana these days, they ask one another, “Have you started making hurricane plans?” The question itself evinces that there is no plan for the state and country as a whole.

The state government issues some statements telling residents to stock up on water, fill their vehicle’s gas tanks, and so on. The meaning is clear: We’re on our own.

The Cuban approach

Socialist Cuba may be only 90 miles from South Florida, but it’s a world away, especially when it comes to dealing with storms. The whole of Cuban society is mobilized to deal with hurricanes, and the aftermath is about recovery, not greed. Regular preparedness drills are conducted everywhere. The focus is on risk reduction with an integrated response from local fire departments, health, transportation, and other public services.

Before storms occur, Cuban government officials, police, and military personnel help people move their belongings to safer locations. The government also guarantees replacement of all lost property.

Most impressively, they have a 100-year plan to move towns further inland in response to climate change. Cuba is carrying out major reforestation efforts. They have increased forest cover to 30.6% of the island, up from the mere 14% that existed at the time of the 1959 revolution. The country is a leader in urban agriculture, with 35,000 hectares being used for farming in the capital city, Havana. These are only a couple examples of Cuba’s proactive approach to dealing with the ecological crisis that is driving more frequent and intense storms.

Cuba was prepared to help during Katrina

When discussing Cuba and hurricanes, we must never forget that Cuba prepared to

send 1,600 medics, field hospitals, and 83 tons of medical supplies to help the devastated Gulf South after Hurricane Katrina. The George W. Bush administration refused while botching its own response. The racist indifference of the administration to the plight of Black and working-class victims of the storms marked the era and, for many, was as much a source of politicization as the Iraq war and then the 2007-08 financial crisis.

After being brushed off, the Cuban medics continued to prepare, just in case they got the go-ahead to help. A Sept. 12, 2005, [NBC News article](#) reported:

“They remain on stand-by, their bags packed. And while they wait at a Havana medical school that normally houses international scholarship students, the brigade has been brushing up on English skills, the epidemiology common to natural disasters, and the local history of Louisiana and Mississippi.”

Testimony from a Cuban citizen

A Cuban friend of Struggle-La Lucha – who spent a great deal of time with us in May 2023 during the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation to Havana – kindly summarized Cuba’s approach. We thank her for this contribution, and for all the solidarity we in the U.S. get from Cuba.

“As a consequence of its geographical position, Cuba has been repeatedly affected by several tropical storms and hurricanes, receiving the onslaught of a little more than 20 of these organisms during the last 50 years.

“For 2024, the seasonal forecast, issued since 1996 by the Cuban Institute of Meteorology, suggests the emergence of 20 tropical storms, 11 of them could reach the category of hurricane. Before 1959, there was no integral national system in our country to act preventively in the face of natural disasters, so their effects caused real catastrophes with very high numbers of material losses and human lives. The

1926, 1932, and 1944 hurricanes were among the most lethal phenomena of the time.

“Many people wonder how is it possible that a country with so many economic limitations can evacuate more than 700,000 people in a short time and reduce mortality to a minimum. In the first place, it is due to the political will of the Cuban Government and State, which, from the very beginning of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, outlined strategies to safeguard the lives of citizens without sparing resources.

“Among the main actions carried out was the creation of the Civil Defense System in July 1966, which to date has been in charge of controlling the protection measures for the population and its assets, economic resources, social infrastructure, and natural resources that must be adopted before, during and after the occurrence of disasters.

“Also key is the organization of our society, the strengthening of the meteorological service and its early warning systems (including the timely transmission of information), the active participation of the people in compliance with the protection measures oriented and the role of the media. Every year during the month of May, the Meteoro Popular Exercise is carried out in the national territory, where all national institutions are prepared not only to face the cyclonic season but also to mitigate vulnerabilities to other possible catastrophes.

“In Cuba, the damages caused by disasters are further aggravated by the U.S. blockade, which considerably limits a quick and effective recovery. However, in the face of natural hurricanes, the Antillean nation has received hurricanes of solidarity in response, with the U.S. people among the main protagonists.

Sources

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“Como consecuencia de su posición geográfica, Cuba se ha visto afectada en reiteradas ocasiones por el paso de diversas tormentas tropicales y huracanes, recibiendo los embates de poco más de una veintena de estos organismos durante los últimos 50 años.

“Para el 2024 el pronóstico estacional, que desde 1996 emite el Instituto Cubano de Meteorología, plantea el surgimiento de 20 tormentas tropicales, de las cuales 11 podrían alcanzar la categoría de huracán. Antes de 1959, en nuestro país no existía un sistema integral nacional que permitiera actuar de manera preventiva frente a los desastres naturales, por lo que sus efectos provocaban verdaderas catástrofes con elevadísimas cifras de pérdidas materiales y de vidas humanas. Entre los fenómenos más letales de la época pueden mencionarse los huracanes de 1926, 1932 y 1944.

“Muchas personas se preguntan ¿cómo es posible que un país con tantas limitaciones económicas pueda evacuar hasta más de 700 000 personas en poco tiempo y reducir al mínimo la mortalidad? En primer lugar, se debe a la voluntad política del Gobierno y el Estado cubanos, que desde el mismo triunfo de la Revolución trazaron estrategias para salvaguardar la vida de los ciudadanos sin escatimar recursos.

“Entre las principales acciones llevadas a cabo estuvo la creación del Sistema de Defensa Civil en julio de 1966, encargado hasta la fecha de controlar las medidas de protección de la población y sus bienes, los recursos económicos, la infraestructura social y los recursos naturales que deben adoptarse antes, durante y posterior a la

ocurrencia de desastres.

“También resulta clave la organización de nuestra sociedad, el fortalecimiento del servicio meteorológico y de sus sistemas de alerta temprana (incluido la transmisión oportuna de la información), la participación activa del pueblo en cumplimiento de las medidas de protección orientadas y el papel de los medios de comunicación. Cada año durante el mes de mayo, se lleva a cabo en el territorio nacional el Ejercicio Popular Meteoro, donde todas las instituciones nacionales se preparan no solo para enfrentar la temporada ciclónica, sino también para mitigar vulnerabilidades ante otras posibles catástrofes.

“En Cuba los perjuicios causados por situaciones de desastres son arreciados aún más por causa del bloqueo impuesto por EEUU, que limita considerablemente una recuperación rápida y efectiva. Pero, ante embates de huracanes naturales la nación antillana ha recibido huracanes de solidaridad como respuesta, con el propio pueblo estadounidense entre los principales protagonistas.

Fuentes:

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