

'Preparing for the Worst'

Friday, September 23, 2005

Associated Press



GALVESTON, Texas — Hurricane Rita was downgraded to a Category 4 storm Thursday afternoon as it swirled toward the Gulf Coast with sustained winds measured at 145 mph.

An estimated 1.8 million residents or more in Texas and Louisiana were under orders to evacuate to avoid a deadly repeat of Hurricane Katrina. "This is the worst planning I've ever seen," said Julie Anderson, who covered just 45 miles in 12 hours after setting out from her home in the Houston suburb of LaPorte. "They say we've learned a lot from Hurricane Katrina. Well, you couldn't prove it by me."

Texas authorities were to begin airlifting at least 9,000 people from Beaumont and Houston, including nursing home residents, those without transportation and the homeless, to inland Texas cities. Military troops in South Texas also started moving north and schools, businesses and universities were closed.

Engineers say a 10- to 12-foot surge was required to overtake the levees at 17th Street and the London canal in New Orleans. But in neighboring St. Bernard Parish, a surge of 5 to 6 feet was all that was needed to swamp the area again.

The Category 5 storm weakened slightly Thursday to a Category 4, forecasters said it could be down to a Category 3 meaning winds as high as 130 mph — by the time it comes ashore late Friday or early Saturday.

At 5 p.m. EDT, Rita was centered about 405 miles southeast of Galveston and was moving at near 9 mph. Its winds were near 140 mph, down from 175 mph earlier in the day. Forecasters predicted it would come ashore somewhere along a 350-mile stretch of the Texas and Louisiana coast that includes Port Arthur near the midpoint.

"Unfortunately, we have already received reports [of price gouging] on gasoline, hotel rooms, car rentals — a variety of other things people need," Aboutt said, noting that whereas a 6-pack of water normally costs less than \$2, some businesses are now charging up to \$7 for that product.

Rita is the 17th named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, making this the fourth-busiest season since record keeping started in 1851. The record is 21 tropical storms in 1933. The hurricane season is not over until Nov. 30.

1. About how many miles per hour was Julie Anderson able to travel?
2. What is the difference between what Engineers estimated the requirement to overtake a levee, in comparison to what occurred in St. Bernard Parish? Why might this be an issue?
3. Explain the difference in a Category 3 and 4 storms. Are they stronger than a Category 5? Explain.
4. Approximately how many years have records pertaining to hurricane seasons been kept?
5. If today is Friday, September 23, 2005 at 8:00 p.m., and of course, you are anxiously working diligently on the beloved Daughtry Times, approximately how many hours remain in the 2005 hurricane season?
6. In your personal opinion, do you think this year will shatter the previous hurricane season record? Why or why not? Explain.
7. In paragraph form, explain three legitimate and educational purposes behind The Daughtry Times.