

Federal forecasters expect busy Atlantic hurricane season

NOAA's 2008 HURRICANE FORECAST



Hurricane Katrina, 2005

12-16 Named storms

6-9 Hurricanes

2-5 Major hurricanes

Category 3, 4 or 5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale.

By [Doyle Rice](#), USA TODAY Government forecasters are predicting a worse-than-usual hurricane season and hope the forecast will be taken seriously despite similar predictions in the past two years that did not hold up.

The Atlantic remains in an extended period of active hurricane seasons that began in 1995, Gerry Bell, lead seasonal hurricane forecaster at the Climate Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), said Thursday.

"People should remember that the 2003-05 seasons saw a total of 31 Atlantic hurricanes," he said. "Although we've had a break the past two years, there's no reason to think that break will continue."

NOAA forecasters predict a 60%-70% likelihood of 12-16 storms strong enough to be named, meaning sustained winds of at least 39 mph. They expect six to nine to develop into hurricanes — storms with winds reaching 74 mph. Of those, the forecast says, two to five are likely to be classified as major, with winds of 111 mph or higher.

Since 1950, an average Atlantic hurricane season has 11 named storms, six of them hurricanes.

After two seasons of average or below-average activity, weather officials and emergency managers stressed preparedness.

"Living in a coastal state means having a plan for each and every hurricane season" NOAA Administrator Conrad Lautenbacher said at a news conference Thursday in Tampa. "Planning and preparation are the key to storm survival."

The NOAA forecast is similar to predictions by researchers at Colorado State University and the AccuWeather commercial weather service.

The season officially runs June 1-Nov. 30, usually with a peak around the end of August.

Last year, although 15 storms formed and six grew into hurricanes, only Humberto reached land in the USA. However, three powerful hurricanes — Dean, Felix and Noel — slammed Central America and the Caribbean, killing hundreds.

Bell said the 2007 forecast was off in part because predicted wind patterns from La Niña didn't develop until later. The 2006 forecast was off because of a rapidly developing El Niño, he said.