

3 Million Without Power as Category 4 Helene Lashes the South

Authorities rescued people trapped by floodwaters and more than 3 million customers were in the dark across much of the southeastern U.S. as Hurricane Helene weakened to a tropical storm over Georgia and South Carolina early Friday after making landfall overnight in northwestern Florida as a Category 4 storm.

Helene came ashore amid warnings from the National Hurricane Center that the enormous system could create a “nightmare” storm surge. There were at least four storm-related deaths.

Video on social media sites showed sheets of rain coming down in Perry, Florida, near where Helene made landfall, and siding being torn off buildings. One local news station showed a home that had flipped over. The community and much of surrounding Taylor County were without power.

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In Citrus County, some 120 miles (193 kilometers) south of Perry, first responders were out in boats early Friday to rescue people trapped by the flooding.

“If you are trapped and need help please call for rescuers – DO NOT TRY TO TREAD FLOODWATERS YOURSELF,” the sheriff’s office warned in a Facebook post. The water may contain live wires, sewage, sharp objects and other debris, they posted.

As of Friday morning still carrying maximum sustained winds of 70 mph (110 kph) , Helene continued to weaken while moving farther inland over Georgia. The storm was about 40 miles (65

kilometers) east of Macon and about 100 miles (165 kilometers) southeast of Atlanta, moving north at 30 mph (48 kph) at 5 a.m., the hurricane center in Miami reported.

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“We expect it to weaken further. It’s going to turn northward and turn northwestward and eventually move into Tennessee and Kentucky, and merge with a funnel system up in that area,” said Jack Beven, a senior hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center.

The storm should continue to weaken Friday afternoon, with winds dropping below 40 mph (64 kph), but it will still produce widespread heavy rain over the Appalachian Mountains with the possibility of mudslides and flash flooding, Beven said.

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