

Florida Under State of Emergency; Braces for Category 4 Hurricane

Tampa is preparing for what could be its first direct hurricane hit in 100 years, with parts of the city under mandatory evacuations as residents brace for Hurricane Ian's impact.

The massive storm moving over Cuba this morning is expected to gain strength as it heads for the Florida coast. Storm surges along Florida's west coast are expected to reach five to 10 feet in some areas.

"We expect to have to evacuate over 300,000 people and it will take some time," declared Florida's Hillsborough County Administrator Bonny Wise early this week.

"Please treat this storm seriously. It's the real deal. This is not a drill," Hillsborough County Emergency Management Director Timothy Dudley said on Monday.

Many Floridians are scrambling to board up their homes, fill up sandbags, stock up on essentials or evacuate. A Tampa hospital in the evacuation zone put up protective aqua fencing designed to keep the water out so they don't have to evacuate patients.

Florida is under a state of emergency with almost every area expected to feel Ian's impact of high winds and flooding. Around 7,000 National Guard members have already been activated in the state.

"What I'm most worried about are the facts, the fact that these storms are so unpredictable," said Tampa Mayor Jane Castor.

Operation Blessing is on the ground in the Tampa area ready to help in the days to come.

“Thanks to the support of Operation Blessing’s partners we are able to be here ready to support the local community who will undoubtedly be affected by this storm,” said David Wright from Operation Blessing.

As Hurricane Ian inches closer to Florida, NASA scrubbed its planned Artemis One launch, rolling back the \$4 billion rocket from the launch pad.

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