

Ida Weakens as Rescues Begin and Damage Is Assessed

Hurricane Ida became a tropical storm as its top winds slowed over Mississippi on Monday, while across southeast Louisiana residents waited for daylight to be rescued from floodwaters and see how much damage was caused by one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to strike the U.S. mainland.

All of New Orleans lost power right around sunset Sunday, leading to an uneasy night of pouring rain and howling winds. The weather died down shortly before dawn and people began carefully walking around neighborhoods with flashlights, dodging downed light poles, pieces of roofs and branches.

Levees failed or were overtopped in the maze of rivers and bayous south of New Orleans, threatening hundreds of homes. On social media, people posted their addresses and locations—directing search and rescue teams to their attics or rooftops.

Officials promised to start the massive rescue effort as the weather broke and the sun rose.

The torrential rains mostly moved into Mississippi on Monday as the storm slowly moved north. Destructive winds and water already had a catastrophic impact along the southeast coast of Louisiana, and life-threatening river flooding continued well inland, the National Hurricane Center said.

Ida made landfall on the same day 16 years earlier that Hurricane Katrina ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi, and its 150 mph (230 kph) winds tied it for the fifth-strongest hurricane to ever hit the mainland. It was already blamed for one death, someone hit by a falling tree in Prairieville, outside Baton Rouge, deputies with the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office confirmed on Sunday.

More than a million customers in Louisiana and Mississippi were without power according to , which tracks outages nationwide, increasing their vulnerability to flooding and leaving them without air conditioning and refrigeration in sweltering summer heat.

Entergy confirmed that the only power in New Orleans was coming from generators, the city's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness tweeted, citing "catastrophic transmission damage." The city relies on Entergy for backup power for the pumps that send storm water over the city's levees. The system is much-improved since Katrina, but Ida is posing its biggest test since that disaster.

The 911 system in Orleans Parish also experienced technical difficulties early Monday. Anyone needing emergency assistance was urged to go to their nearest fire station or approach their nearest officer, the New Orleans Emergency Communications Center tweeted.

Ida finally became a tropical storm again 16 hours after making landfall in Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane. Its top sustained wind were 60 mph (97 kph) early Monday, and forecasters said it would rapidly weaken while still dumping torrential rain over a large area. The storm was centered about 95 miles (155 kilometers) south-southwest of Jackson, Mississippi, moving north at 8 mph (13 kmh).

The rising ocean swamped the barrier island of Grand Isle and roofs on buildings around Port Fourchon blew off as Ida made landfall. The hurricane then churned through the far southern Louisiana wetlands, swirled over the state's petrochemical corridor and threatened the more than 2 million people living in and around New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Officials said Ida intensified into an extremely powerful hurricane too quickly over the Gulf of Mexico to organize a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans' 390,000 residents. Many

didn't have enough gas and hotel money, transportation or other resources needed to flee. Hospitals also had no choice but to hunker down, counting on generators to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

In Baton Rouge, 27-year-old Robert Owens watched the sky in his neighborhood light up as transformers blew up all around him.

"Never in my life have I encountered something this major," he said as giant gusts rattled his home's windows.

Significant flooding was reported late Sunday night in LaPlace near Lake Pontchartrain and in places like Lafitte, where a barge struck a swinging bridge in town. {eoa}

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