

Hurricane Katrina

On August 29, 2005, a Category 5 hurricane, named Katrina, devastated the Gulf Coast from over 100 miles away from its center. Katrina was one of the costliest (more than \$81 billion) and deadliest (killing at least 1,836 people) hurricanes in the history of the United States. Its storm surge caused catastrophic damage along the Gulf coast, devastating the cities of and around New Orleans, Louisiana, Mobile, Alabama, and Biloxi and Gulfport in Mississippi.

Forming on August 23, 2005 as a Tropical Depression over the Bahamas, the system was upgraded to Tropical Storm status on August 24. At this point, the storm was named Katrina. On August 25, Katrina was upgraded to hurricane status and made landfall in Florida, but weakened in strength. However, after entering the Gulf of Mexico, Katrina regained hurricane status and rapidly intensified due to moving over the Gulf's warmer waters. On August 27, the hurricane reached Category 3 intensity, becoming the 3rd major Atlantic hurricane of the season. On August 28, Hurricane Katrina became a Category 5 storm and reached its peak intensity at 1:00 pm, central time, with maximum sustained winds of 175 miles per hour.

Katrina's storm surge caused several levees to breach around New Orleans, which subsequently flooded much of the city. The storm surge also devastated the coasts of Mississippi and Alabama. Federal disaster declarations covered 90,000 square miles of the United States, an area almost as large as the United Kingdom. The hurricane left an estimated three million people without electricity. On September 3, 2005, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff described the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as "probably the worst catastrophe, or set of catastrophes," in the country's history, referring to the hurricane itself plus the flooding of New Orleans.

One year has passed since Hurricane Katrina landed on the Gulf Coast and affected millions of Americans, both directly and indirectly. If you are interested in learning more about the people who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina, please visit "Alive in Truth" (<http://www.aliveintruth.org>). The mission of this Austin-based non-profit organization is "to document individual lives, to restore community bonds, and to uphold the voices, culture, rights, and history of New Orleanians." Teachers, you may find this site more appropriate for older students, so please review the material on the site before sharing with your students. Some of the interviews can evoke strong emotional responses.

Sources:

- *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, <http://www.noaa.gov>
- *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- *Alive in Truth*, <http://www.aliveintruth.org>