

Powerful storm winds hit Houston, Texas leaving 5 dead and 740,000 without power

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Houston, Texas, saw 100 mile per hour winds (161 km/h) from a straight-ahead wind storm known as a derecho on Thursday which left five dead and one million customers without power as of late that night, mostly in Harris County, where the city proper is located and is home to more than 4.7 million people.

Transmission towers carrying high voltage lines were crumpled, while skyscrapers in the city suffered destroyed windows littering the streets with glass. One tornado, an EF1, was confirmed near Cypress just outside of Houston. This follows a previous tornado just six weeks ago that hit the suburb of Katy in Houston.

At least two of the recorded deaths were from falling trees, with one death being attributed to a crane collapsing. A nightclub partially collapsed, and a roof was stripped off a Hyatt Regency in downtown, according to eyewitness video. In neighboring Louisiana, where the hurricane-force winds left a swath of damage, 215,000 households were without power as of Friday morning.

While the strongest gusts recorded by a wind gauge were 78 mph (125 km/h), survey teams estimated thunderstorm winds around 90-100 mph (145-160 km/h) in Baytown, while downtown Houston suffered straight-line winds peaking at 100 mph (160 km/h), which by the Fujita scale would put the winds at EF1 force, or at Category 2 hurricane.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire advised residents to stay at home and off the roads. "Many roads are impassable due to downed power lines, debris and fallen trees," Whitmire stated. Additionally, many traffic lights were damaged. In Bryan, Texas, about 100 miles to the northwest, 20 people were rescued after driving into flood waters.

CenterPoint Energy, a privately owned for-profit power and gas company which operates the city's power infrastructure, confirmed to local news that its skyscraper downtown and systems had been damaged as a result of

the storms. According to a CenterPoint spokesperson in a Q&A with local news, it is "too early" to know when the power will be restored for all of those impacted.

According to the company, 2,000 employees and contractors are performing damage assessment and restoration. An additional 4,000 line workers and 1,000 vegetation professionals have been requested. The company confirmed 920,000 customers were without power.

Judge Lina Hidalgo, Harris County's chief executive, said in a press conference that it is possible that residents in the area could be without power for weeks, testifying to the incompatibility of private property and profit with the interests of the vast majority of society. As of Friday morning, 740,000 were still without power.

Hundreds of deaths are recorded from hot weather in Southwestern states like Texas every year. Houston is particularly problematic given its high humidity. With temperatures expected to be in the 90s Fahrenheit (32+ degrees Celsius) for the coming days, it is likely that many will suffer heat stroke or even death as a result of the loss of air conditioning due to the continuing outages.

Hidalgo said that such high winds were not experienced in the Houston area since Hurricane Alicia in 1983. Officials apparently were not expecting strong gusts, with meteorologists saying the storm was at "the peak end of an unlikely scenario to happen."

Because of this, many were only aware of the storm once it was basically on top of them. Derechos are hard to predict, partially owing to the character of the storms themselves but also because of the lack of data on the storms from high altitude sources. While the National Weather Service (NWS) maintains more than 1,000 monitoring locations, only around 92 weather balloons are launched every day in the US and its territories. Many of the initial features, which would aid in predicting derechos, are only visible from the altitude at which these

balloons (or high altitude drones) fly.

Andrew Mercer, a meteorologist at Mississippi State who studies derecho formation, spoke to this in a *Wired* article in 2020, at which point the US had about 200 balloons launched daily. “All we have is these snapshots two times a day at 100 points for the entire country, which makes it really hard to get good wind data in the upper levels of the atmosphere,” Mercer said. “What our models really need is much more frequent sampling, especially in the hours leading up to the event.”

A “key ingredient,” as *Wired* put it, for derecho development is strong vertical wind shear. That is, that the wind at such an altitude, about 10 miles in the air, would be blowing at different speeds, and the weather balloons would pick this up, facilitating a more accurate prediction. There is also the matter of establishing a better prediction model, which requires an allocation of resources to such atmospheric research. The allocating of society’s resources to such problems saves lives, yet it is evident that this is not a priority of the US ruling class.

Derecho, Spanish for “straight,” is a “widespread, long-lived windstorm that is associated with a band of rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms,” according to the NWS. The first such event was recorded in 1877. Unlike tornadoes or hurricanes, the winds produced in these weather events flow in a straight line instead of a rotating column. Typically they occur during the warm season, between May and August.

Thursday’s storm received its classification as a derecho as the wind damage exceeded a swath of more than 240 miles (386 km/h) and included wind gusts exceeding 58 mph (93 km/h).

Texas has seen a number of significant derechos in recent history, including the high wind derecho event of May 2, 2007 which crippled power infrastructure in the Dallas metro area leaving 300,000 without power, with winds as high as 80 mph (129 km/h) from the Metroplex eastward. In Kaufman County, winds were estimated at 90-100 mph (145-161 km/h).

On May 4, 1989, a derecho swept through Texas causing over 250,000 customers to lose power in Tarrant County, the Ft. Worth metropolitan area, in “The Great Storm of 1989.”

A number of derecho events, more recent and historical, have swept other parts of the US, most commonly the Midwestern US. Two of the most recent to occur were the June 2023 Midwest derecho affecting parts of Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana, which left 300,000 without power, and a tornado outbreak and derecho on

April 1-3, 2024, which caused damage from the Missouri-Illinois border all the way to the West Virginia-Virginia state line and produced 17 tornadoes.

That is to say, these events are nothing new, and given the proper preparation the impact of such events can be mitigated. Transmission towers are not required by any laws of physics to be so flimsy as to be crumpled like soda cans by winds. Rather, it is a matter of cost. Either through strengthened transmission towers and other power infrastructure, burying of cables or other means, power outages from such events can be avoided, but this is money the US ruling class is using for war and to line its own pockets.

Since the start of April, Texas and Louisiana have suffered a series of extreme rain events. Rainfall over the past two weeks exceeded 600 percent of what is typically expected, according to the Weather Prediction Center of the US National Weather Service.

As CNN noted, “It’s a sign the atmosphere is primed to unload extreme amounts of rain, a phenomenon that is becoming more frequent in a warming world driven by human-caused climate change.”

Similarly, the number of derechos have increased as a result of human-caused climate change. Despite the increasing number of extreme weather events, which result unnecessarily in fatalities, injuries and displacement, capitalist governments around the world continue to put profits above lives. President “Genocide” Joseph Biden and the capitalist politicians in both parties, who are busy shoveling billions to the genocidal Israeli regime and the Nazi-infested Ukrainian regime and trillions for world war, have no money to spare when it comes to propping up the crumbling infrastructure at home or stopping preventable deaths from climate change. A socialist society is necessary if such man-made disasters are to be prevented.



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