

Global warming and negligence fuel deadly impact of Hurricane Beryl, heat wave and California wildfires

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Millions across the US are currently living through the impact of a trifecta of natural disasters—Hurricane Beryl in Texas, a heat wave from coast to coast and wildfires in California—all of which have been made more intense and deadly by capitalist-induced global warming and the lack of emergency preparedness by the government.

Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Matagorda, Texas southwest of Houston at 4:30 a.m. on Monday as a Category 1 storm before moving northeast. News media reported ten people were killed during the storm, which had wind gusts up to 95 miles per hour and produced tornadoes in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas.

As the storm continued to move northeast, a flood watch was in effect for parts of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Tornadoes remain a possibility in Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, according to forecasters.

As of late Monday, over 2.7 million people in Texas were without power as temperatures soared into the 90s Fahrenheit (32+ C). According to Off the Grid, a Texas power outage tracker, 1.8 million were still without electricity as of Tuesday evening.

In the Houston area, three people were killed by falling trees, two people drowned and one died in a house fire. In Galveston County, two people died from carbon monoxide poisoning due to improperly ventilated gas powered generators.

Another individual died in Galveston County when they were unable to operate their oxygen tank without power. In Bossier Parish, Louisiana, local officials reported a woman was killed when a tree fell on her house.

The storm first made landfall on July 1 in Grenada's Carriacou Island as a Category 4 hurricane. It battered the southern Caribbean Islands and flattened hundreds of structures. At least six people were killed. Officials in

Jamaica reported on Monday that residents are facing food shortages after Beryl destroyed over \$6.4 million in crops and supporting infrastructure.

Driven by record-high ocean temperatures, Beryl became the earliest Category 4 and Category 5 storm on record. The weather system stunned meteorologists as it went from a tropical storm to a powerful hurricane in less than two days.

Other historical milestones that Hurricane Beryl surpassed are that it is the third earliest Atlantic major hurricane on record and it is the earliest June major hurricane to be formed east of the Lesser Antilles on record. The increase in wind speeds, which surged from 65 mph around 2 p.m. on June 29 to 130 mph by 2 p.m. on June 30 and a total increase of 95 mph in just 42.5 hours is one the most rapid such intensifications this early in the season in the Atlantic Basin.

While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has predicted an extremely active hurricane season, which began on June 1 and ends November 30—with 17 to 25 named storms, eight to 13 hurricanes, and four to seven major hurricanes Category 3 and above—little or nothing has been done to prepare the public for this eventuality.

In an interview with Associated Press two weeks ago, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said that the Disaster Relief Fund of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will run out of money half way through the 2024 hurricane season, leaving millions without even the pittance offered by the government agency.

Meanwhile, the US government continues to deny that extreme heat and wildfire smoke are major disasters and maintains that those affected are ineligible for federal emergency responses.

As of Tuesday, 128 million people across the US were under heat advisories as an intense heat wave continues in most of the West and South.

The National Weather Service reported the national high of 129 F (54 C) was recorded near Tecopa, California, in the Mojave Desert. Las Vegas reached 117 F (47 C), Phoenix hit 116 F (47 C) and Tucson 111 F (44 C).

On Monday, a news release from Multnomah County in Oregon reported four people died of heat-related illnesses over the weekend. Three of the four were residents of the county, while the fourth individual was transported from outside the county and later died in a Portland hospital.

Dozens of locations in the West and Pacific Northwest tied or broke heat records in recent days, and more than 165 daily high temperature records could be tied or broken during the week.

A news release on Sunday from Death Valley National Park on Sunday said a visitor on motorcycle died the day before from heat exposure near Badwater Basin.

The release said, “Another visitor was treated for severe heat illness and transported to advanced medical care in Las Vegas, four others were treated onsite and released. All 6 motorcyclists were members of the same party. Due to the high temperatures, emergency medical flight helicopters were unable to respond, as they cannot generally fly safely over 120 degrees.”

Temperatures as high as 128 F, which broke the previous record of 127 F, were reported on Saturday in Death Valley, one of the hottest locations on the planet.

Death Valley National Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds issued a statement saying, “High heat like this can pose real threats to your health. While this is a very exciting time to experience potential world record setting temperatures in Death Valley, we encourage visitors to choose their activities carefully, avoiding prolonged periods of time outside of an air-conditioned vehicle or building when temperatures are this high.”

Heat is the deadliest of weather conditions because it kills more than twice as many people each year on average than hurricanes and tornadoes combined.

Amid the record breaking heat wave, the Thompson wildfire in California burned in 3,789 acres over the weekend before it was contained on Monday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Department spokesperson Rick Carhart told the *Los Angeles Times*, “The word that our fire chief has been using to describe the fire is stubborn. The fire broke out on a day that was extremely hot, quite windy and the

humidity was almost nothing.”

Thirteen single-family homes were destroyed, five were damaged and thirteen other buildings were destroyed in the fire. Carhart reported that two firefighters were injured.

Other fires in the state include the Vista fire in the San Bernardino National Forest which is burning near Mount Baldy and Wrightwood, the US Forest Service said. The *Times* report said, “The fire nearly doubled in size overnight and has burned 1,095 acres since it started Sunday afternoon in steep, remote terrain. Details on the fire’s containment were not immediately available.”

Although there have been no reports of civilian injuries, according to a research study from the University of California-Davis, wildfire smoke has caused thousands of premature deaths each year. The study showed that, as fires become more frequent, smoke is leading to a public health emergency having contributed to more than 52,000 premature deaths across California from 2008 to 2018.

While wildfires have typically been associated with economic damage—the fires during the ten years in the study destroyed \$430 billion in economic value—the study said that in the years 2017 and 2018, more than 10,000 people died from the health impacts.

The UC Davis study said that wildfire smoke contains chemicals that are toxic and potentially more harmful to human respiratory health than the typical particulates found in urban environments. Meanwhile, the public health threat spreads beyond the fire zones themselves. The wildfires are in forested areas but smoke travels hundreds or thousands of miles, bringing health impacts into major population centers.



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