

Hurricane Francine brings major flooding and extensive power outages to Louisiana

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Hurricane Francine made landfall in Louisiana as a Category 2 hurricane on Wednesday with 100 mph (160 kmh) winds, causing blackouts for hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses.

Francine is the fourth hurricane of the season and the seventh named storm. The storm rapidly intensified from a tropical storm to a Category 2 hurricane, fueled by extremely warm water in the western Gulf of Mexico. Capitalist-induced climate change has contributed to the rapid intensification of storms, with one study published in *Nature* last year finding that the intensification rate of hurricanes is now 30 percent greater than in the 1990s.

The storm rapidly weakened after making landfall, but this caused it to linger for hours, producing more than seven inches of rain over parts of New Orleans and limited flooding, making Wednesday the ninth wettest day since records began in 1946.

As of yesterday, up to 14 million people remained under flood watches from the Florida Panhandle and New Orleans to as far as Memphis, Tennessee.

In the River Parishes between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, close to 300 homes were flooded. So far, no deaths have been reported, though several people have suffered serious injuries from falling trees in the state. Some residents, who are still recovering from the 2021 Hurricane Ida, were again flooded such as in Lafourche Parish, where residents complained that not enough was being done to keep the flood waters at bay.

As one resident, Henry Kraemer Jr. pointed out to WGNO, the nearby Bayou Boeuf was causing flooding, and the levee had not been raised like the nearby lake despite the issue being known for years. Many residents are unable to afford flood insurance and are being stuck with immense costs for tearing out all of the water-logged parts of their homes.

Water damage can cause entire structures to become unsafe for habitation, leading to deadly black mold infestations that can cause people to develop asthma, significantly increase the risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lead to life-threatening lung infections and even death, especially in those who are immunocompromised. Children are particularly vulnerable to developing long-term health issues with continuous exposure to black mold.

Public schools in New Orleans were closed on Wednesday and Thursday as a precaution against the storm's impacts. As of Friday, some New Orleans schools had reopened.

The reaction of the ruling class has been predictably mute, with only the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Deanne Criswell being sent to New Orleans despite widespread power outages.

While a federal emergency has been declared in Louisiana, as of this writing neither US President Joseph Biden nor the Kamala Harris campaign has released any statements on the storm or on restoring power to the hundreds of thousands affected by the storm.

The most that was said was on the White House X account on Thursday which merely noted the administration is "monitoring" Hurricane Francine and that an emergency declaration had been made with federal agencies responding on the ground.

This lack of any serious statement constitutes a message to the ruling elite: "We will continue the policy of malign neglect, insuring that money that could be spent on the war with Russia will not be wasted on workers suffering from natural disasters."

Multiple highways were blocked in Baton Rouge, including Interstate 10 eastbound, west of Louisiana

State Highway 22, where a state police trooper was struck by a fallen tree. Other sections of state highways were closed, including La 1 north and La 405, which are the main routes between western Iberville and Ascension.

Numerous parishes imposed curfews, while emergency crews removed fallen trees and debris, including in Ascension, Livingston, East Baton Rouge, East and West Feliciana and Iberville.

The storm caused widespread flash floods as far as Jackson, Mississippi; Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia.

New Orleans was hit particularly hard three years ago by Hurricane Ida, which marked the first time in US history that hurricanes with sustained winds of 150 mph (241 kmh) hit a state in back-to-back seasons following Hurricane Laura. The response to that disaster was a continuation of the policy of official indifference taken by the government and political establishment in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, where 1,800 people died as a result of decades of the neglect of infrastructure and the lack of any mobilization to protect the lives of the overwhelmingly working class people impacted by the storm.

At the peak Wednesday, 450,000 people in Louisiana were without power, with this number falling to 340,000 on Thursday. Several thousand in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee were also without power as of Thursday. As is usually the case in high wind storms, the power outages were due to falling debris, the source of which is usually trees, which are not properly trimmed by the power company.

The company that suffered the greatest hit was Entergy, which had 260,900 customers without power on Thursday. As of Friday, 10,000 Entergy customers were without power in New Orleans, with 113,000 in total in the state. Entergy is a Fortune 500 for-profit energy company with annual revenues of \$12 billion in 2023.

Entergy was previously criticized for its failure to adequately invest in grid reliability in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida in 2021. It faced investigations in 2010 over whether it was abusing its vertically integrated energy production, where it owned both transmission and power production in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas. At the time, the US Department of Justice made a statement that if the company sold off

its grid in Louisiana that the antitrust concerns would be resolved, though this never happened.

In the large section of the power grid that Entergy controls, which covers 45 million people stretching from Louisiana all the way into Canada, it does not connect to the broader grid and will only use its own generation stations, leading to reduced reliability and higher costs and hence profit.

When the failure to prepare for predictable storms happens, Entergy can capitalize on its own failure by receiving bailouts from the government as it did after Hurricane Katrina when it received \$200 million in federal aid in 2006. The New Orleans City Council also granted a rate increase of 8 percent in 2007 in order to push the cost overwhelmingly onto the working class.

Entergy is an example of the incompatibility of the “free market,” that is, private ownership of the means of production (i.e., the power plants, transmission lines, factories, etc.) with modern society. It cannot even keep the lights and air conditioning on. It is a case study in the objective need for the expropriation of the utilities from the parasitic financial oligarchy that controls them and putting them under the control of the working class.



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