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Tropical Storm Ernesto Nears Leeward Islands, Arriving in USVI This Evening

Virgin Islanders brace for TS Ernesto; heavy rain, strong winds, storm surge, and life-threatening surf expected to begin this evening, with potential for hurricane strength by Thursday over the Greater Antilles

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NOAA's NESDIS/STAR GOES-East Infrared Radar of Tropical Storm Ernesto at 5:00 a.m. on Tues. Aug. 13, 2024. By. NOAA

Tropical Storm Ernesto is rapidly approaching the Leeward Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and residents of the region are being urged to prepare. According to the National Hurricane Center, Ernesto was located near Guadeloupe in the Leeward Islands and is moving westward at a speed of 20 mph, as of 5:00 a.m. Tuesday.

Current status forecast

As of 5:00 a.m., the center of Tropical Storm Ernesto was located at latitude 16.2 North, longitude 61.3 West, approximately 10 miles southeast of Guadeloupe and 350 miles east-southeast of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Ernesto is moving toward the west with maximum sustained winds of 40 mph and higher gusts. The storm's minimum central pressure is recorded at 1007 mb (29.74 inches).

Ernesto is expected to continue its westward motion with a gradual turn to the west-northwest and a slight decrease in forward speed over the next day. The storm is forecasted to pass over portions of the Leeward Islands this morning and move near or over the U.S. and British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico by this evening. After crossing Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, Ernesto is projected to turn northward over the western Atlantic.

Watches and warnings

A Tropical Storm Warning is in effect for the following areas:

- St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, Barbuda, and Anguilla
- Guadeloupe
- St. Martin and St. Barthelemy
- Sint Maarten
- British Virgin Islands
- U.S. Virgin Islands
- Puerto Rico, Vieques, and Culebra

A Tropical Storm Warning indicates that tropical storm conditions are expected within the warning area within 36 hours.

Hazards affecting land

Rainfall: Ernesto is expected to produce total rain accumulations of 4 to 6 inches over portions of the Leeward and Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico could receive 3 to 6 inches of rainfall, with maximum amounts of up to 10 inches, which may lead to significant flash flooding.

Wind: Tropical storm conditions are anticipated to begin in the Leeward Islands within the next few hours and are expected to spread to the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico by this evening.

Storm Surge: A storm surge is predicted to raise water levels by 1 to 3 feet above ground level along the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, including Culebra and Vieques, and in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Similar surges are expected in the British Virgin Islands, with large and destructive waves accompanying the surge near the coast.

Surf: Swells generated by Ernesto are likely to impact portions of the Leeward Islands within the next several hours, causing life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Residents are advised to follow local weather advisories and take necessary precautions.

Preparation and safety measures

Given the current forecast, residents in the affected areas are urged to prepare for heavy rainfall, strong winds, and potential flooding. Officials recommend securing property, gathering emergency supplies, and staying informed through local weather updates.

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