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Monster Hurricane Milton on Collision Course with Florida; Evacuations Ordered for Over a Million

Forecasters predict destructive winds, life-threatening floods, and storm surges up to 15 feet as the Category 4 hurricane targets the Florida Peninsula.

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NOAA's NESDIS/STAR imagery of powerful Hurricane Milton as it barrels towards Florida. By. NOAA

As Floridians brace for Hurricane Milton and evacuate where possible, emergency responders are positioning themselves to manage both pre-landfall preparations and post-storm recovery efforts.

Florida is home to a significant population of Virgin Islanders. The state's central and southern regions, especially areas like Miami-Dade, Broward, and Orange counties, which include cities

such as Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Orlando, respectively, have become key hubs for Caribbean communities due to opportunities in employment, education, and relatively affordable housing, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Research.

At 5 a.m. Tuesday, the National Hurricane Center reported that Milton was just north of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, after lashing the city of Merida with high winds and heavy rain. Now, the monster storm is on a collision course with Florida, where over a million people have been ordered to evacuate ahead of its anticipated arrival on Wednesday night.

Maximum sustained winds are near 155 miles per hour currently, but forecasters warn that fluctuations in intensity are expected. Whether it makes landfall in its current form as a category 4 or not, Milton is expected to remain an extremely dangerous hurricane when it reaches Florida.

Hurricane force winds extend up to 30 miles from the center, and tropical storm force winds can be felt up to 105 miles from the hurricane's eye.

Threats to public safety include a major storm surge, estimated at between 4-6 feet in the Yucatan. In parts of coastal Florida including the Tampa Bay area, water could reach as high as 10-15 feet above ground, forecasters say. Near Altamaha Sound in Georgia, the water could reach up to 3-5 feet above ground level.

Apart from the storm surge in coastal cities, Milton is expected to bring between 5 and 12 inches of rain over the central and northern portions of the Florida Peninsula, with localized totals of up to 18 inches. Along with the rain, forecasters warn, come elevated risks of life-threatening flash flooding in urban areas as well as moderate to major river flooding. The rainfall associated with Milton is expected to continue through Thursday.

The Florida State Guard has mobilized soldiers in preparation for Hurricane Milton, Governor RonDeSantis announced on Monday evening. The Florida Division of Emergency Management is in the process of establishing a 10,000 person base camp at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg to suppose post-landfall responders. Other departments and divisions within the Florida state government have also been mobilized and pre-deployed in an effort to activate an immediate emergency response once Milton has passed. To facilitate evacuations, tolls on roads across Central and West Florida, along with Alligator Alley, have been suspended for seven days beginning Monday.