

The Virgin Islands Consortium

2017 Hurricane Season Has Potential To Be 'Extremely Active,' NOAA Says

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently increased its 2017 hurricane forecast, as the government agency continues to monitor activity in the Atlantic and the African coast.

NOAA now forecasts 14-19 named storms, 5-9 hurricanes and 2-5 major hurricanes this season.

"The season has the potential to be extremely active," NOAA said in its August outlook, which was published on Wednesday. NOAA forecasters expect a 60 percent chance of an above-average hurricane season.

The updated forecast is above the Atlantic Basin's 30-year historical average (1981-2010) of 12 named storms, six hurricanes and three major hurricanes.

Numbers also increased slightly in Colorado State University's final forecast issued late last week.

A total of 16 named storms and eight hurricanes are expected in the Atlantic Basin, according to the CSU forecast, led by Dr. Phil Klotzbach (via The Weather Channel). Three of the eight hurricanes are forecast to be Category 3 or stronger on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.

Warm water temperatures in the tropical and subtropical Atlantic Ocean along with the dwindling chance of El Niño's development later this summer are reasons why the forecast has steadily nudged upward.

"A warmer-than-normal tropical Atlantic is generally associated with lower surface pressures, increased mid-level moisture and weaker trade winds, creating a more conducive dynamic and thermodynamic environment for hurricane formation and intensification," said the CSU team.

Widespread and hostile upper-level winds typically associated with El Niño will also be a no-show during the heart of the hurricane season ahead, but unfavorable winds aloft still occur at times each season in the Atlantic Basin whether El Niño is present or not, according to CSU and NOAA (via Weather Channel).

"The chance of an El Niño forming, which tends to prevent storms from strengthening, has dropped significantly from May," according to Gerry Bell, Ph.D., lead seasonal hurricane forecaster at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

CSU found five years since 1950 that most closely resemble what's expected in the atmosphere above and waters of the Atlantic Basin from August through October. Those years included 1953, 1969, 1979, 2001 and 2004. The average of those six seasons is slightly lower than the CSU forecast for 2017.