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Fiona Lashes Puerto Rico With Strong Winds, Overwhelms Island With Heavy Rain

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A bridge was swept away by floodwaters in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Fiona made landfall on the island commonwealth on Sunday, Sept. 18, 2022.

Hurricane Fiona struck Puerto Rico's southwest coast on Sunday — two days ahead of the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria's destruction on the island commonwealth — bringing with it strong winds that went with roofs, heavy rain that caused landslides, and overflowing rivers that destroyed vehicles.

Most of the island of 3.2 million people was without power even before the storm arrived, according to Luma, the company that operates the island's power transmission and distribution system. The island's hospitals and health centers were operating on generator power, public

officials said.

The National Hurricane Center said during its 5:00 p.m. forecast on Sunday said Fiona would drop between 12 to 16 inches of rain on Puerto Rico, with local maximum of 25 inches, particularly across the island's eastern and southern areas.

The storm, which wreaked havoc on the island during the same time that Hurricane Hugo struck back on Sept. 17th and 18th in 1989, destroyed roads and completely wrecked a bridge in the mountain town of Utuado that authorities say was built by the National Guard after Hurricane Maria. "The damages that we are seeing are catastrophic," said Governor Pedro Pierluisi.

President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration for Puerto Rico on Sunday, a move that authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency to step in and help coordinate the response effort.

There were about 125 shelters open, with more than 100 hosting people who sought refuge from the storm, according to a website detailing Puerto Rico's emergency services ([via WSJ](#)).

At 5:00 a.m. today, the National Hurricane Center had discontinued the hurricane warning for Puerto Rico, including Vieques and Culebra, and placed the islands under a tropical storm warning instead.

Fiona is moving toward the northwest near 8 mph this morning, and this general motion is expected to continue through tonight, followed by a turn toward the north-northwest on Tuesday and the north on Wednesday, according to N.H.C.'s 5:00 a.m. forecast. On the forecast track, the center of Fiona will move over the eastern portion of the Dominican Republic this morning and emerge over the southwestern Atlantic this afternoon. The center is forecast to pass near or to the east of the Turks and Caicos on Tuesday.

Maximum sustained winds are near 90 mph with higher gusts. Some strengthening is expected during the next few days after the hurricane emerges over the southwestern Atlantic, and Fiona is forecast to become a major hurricane by Wednesday.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 30 miles (45 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 150 miles (240 km). The Punta Cana International Airport recently reported a sustained wind of 58 mph (93 km/h) and a gust of 78 mph (126 km/h).

Fiona strengthened before making landfall as an 80-kt hurricane in the Dominican Republic to the south-southwest of Punta Cana around 3:30 a.m. this morning.

Key Messages:

Hurricane conditions are spreading across portions of the Dominican Republic within the warning area. Tropical storm conditions will continue on Puerto Rico through this morning and over portions of the Dominican Republic within the warning area through tonight.

Heavy rains from outer bands of Fiona will continue across Puerto Rico into this afternoon. The center of Fiona will persist over eastern Dominican Republic into this afternoon with heavy bands lasting through tonight. These rainfall amounts will continue to produce life-threatening and catastrophic flooding along with mudslides and landslides across Puerto Rico. Life-threatening flash and urban flooding is likely for eastern portions of the Dominican Republic.

Fiona is forecast to strengthen after moving away from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Hurricane conditions are expected in the Turks and Caicos on Tuesday, and tropical storm conditions are expected in the southeastern Bahamas by late Monday or early Tuesday.

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