

The Times-Picayune



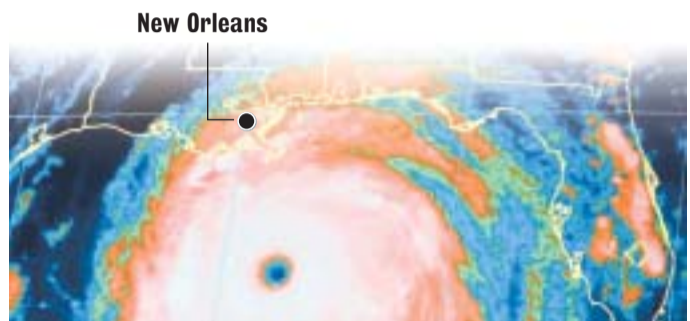
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HURRICANE EDITION

HURRICANE KATRINA

GROUND ZERO



SUPERDOME BECOMES LAST RESORT FOR THOUSANDS UNABLE TO LEAVE

NEW ORLEANS BRACES FOR NIGHTMARE OF THE BIG ONE



STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX BRANDON

Gina Sannoh, 12, carries a case of water as she gets in line to take refuge at the Louisiana Superdome Sunday. Thousands of people with special medical needs or those who simply could not get out of the city came to the Dome to escape the storm, which was forecast to make a direct hit on the New Orleans area today.

At least 10,000 find refuge at the Superdome

By Gwen Filosa
Staff writer

A 2-year-old girl, clutching a bottle and ignoring her knock-off Barbie doll, running in circles around her mother. Homeless men trying to doze on the sidewalk, using backpacks as pillows. People without cars. People with cars but nowhere to go.

More than 10,000 of them.

These are the people without enough money or luck to leave town as Hurricane Katrina was poised to have its way with New Orleans.

With a mandatory evacuation hanging over the city Sunday morning, they were left with no

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STAFF PHOTO BY ELIOT KAMENTZ

On Sunday at 11:10 a.m., traffic is sparse in both directions looking toward downtown from the Broad Street overpass the day after contraflow was put into effect.

By Gordon Russell
Staff writer

As a ferocious Hurricane Katrina drew a bead on their precariously sited city and suburbs, metropolitan New Orleans residents prayed for salvation and scrambled to prepare their homes for a storm with the power to level the city and flood whole neighborhoods, struggling to get themselves, their loved ones and their neighbors to safety.

Some residents might have been predicting a close call, along the lines of last year's Hurricane Ivan, which threatened the city but then spared it serious damage. Katrina, by contrast, stubbornly hewed to the track predicted by hurricane forecasters Friday, one that aimed it straight at the Crescent City.

On Sunday at 4 p.m., National Hurricane Center Meteorologist Chris Lauer said Katrina was still on track to hit the New Orleans area as a devastating Category 5 hurricane as its eye comes ashore this morning. A computer model estimate of storm surge conducted by the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center Sunday afternoon indicates that even without

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HURRICANE KATRINA

Utilities prepare for the worst

Thousands of workers, trucks assembling

By Keith Darcé
Business writer

Some parts of the New Orleans area could be without electricity and telephone service for weeks, or even months, if flooding and damage from Hurricane Katrina hamper repair crews, utility officials said Sunday afternoon.

"This is going to be really bad," said Dan Packer, chief executive officer of Entergy New Orleans, the city's electricity supplier.

Packer said the company was bracing for a level of destruction never seen in its four-state territory of Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas.

"I believe damage is going to be fairly extensive. It's going to cover the whole gamut, everything from transmission lines to poles snapping to wires being down," Packer said.

"We think this could be the worst storm in history to affect (Entergy's) electricity distribution system," he added.

Interruptions to power and phone services were expected later Sunday evening, as the outer edge of Katrina moved through the area and wind speeds built to tropical storm and hurricane force.

Entergy repair crews will work on damaged lines until winds in the area reach 35 miles per hour and pose a threat to the workers, Packer said. Workers will not head out again until the storm moves through the area and wind speeds fall below 35 mph, he said.

Once the storm subsides, Entergy will deploy workers to assess damage to the company's power grid before sending out repair crews, Packer said.

The assessment process could take as long as two days to complete, depending on flooding and road damage, he said.

By Sunday afternoon, Entergy and other utilities had positioned thousands of workers, hundreds of trucks, dozens of portable generators, and extra supplies of fuel in Baton Rouge, Jackson, Miss., and other locations on the edge of the metropolitan area.

Entergy had gathered about 2,000 power-line repair workers and tree trimmers, Packer said. Another 5,500 workers were expected to join Entergy during the next two days. Many of those workers, from utilities as far away as New Mexico, have been in southern Florida since late last week, helping restore power to the more than 1 million customers who lost electricity when Katrina crossed the state.

In Orleans and Jefferson parishes, Entergy and BellSouth Corp. moved repair trucks to higher ground, such as elevated roadways, to protect them from flood waters.

Though local interruptions to phone service were expected, much of the region's phone network is likely to remain in tact, BellSouth spokesman Merlin Villar said.

Even if remote phone substations lose power from electricity lines, backup generators and batteries should keep them running for as long as two days after a power failure, he said.

Even before the winds and rain arrived, wireless phone service providers struggled much of Sunday to handle the huge volume of calls on their networks, as tens of thousands of people dialed family and friends while evacuating.

Wireless customers can help minimize the strain on local networks by limiting their use to emergency calls and other high-priority uses, Cingular Wireless spokeswoman Dawn Benton said.

Sending text messages instead of making voice calls also reduces network demands, she said.

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STAFF PHOTOS BY DAVID GRUNFELD

Shelly Byers, 26, of Covington hugs her son Victor at the Red Cross shelter at William Pitcher Jr. High School in Covington. The family found safety from the storm after St. Tammany Parish had called for a mandatory evacuation.

Surge likely to top N.O. levee system

KATRINA, from A-1

waves, a Category 5 storm would flood most of eastern New Orleans, the 9th Ward, Mid-City, much of downtown and areas in St. Tammany close to Lake Pontchartrain. Kenner also will see severe flooding entering from St. Charles Parish. Areas outside the levee protection system are particularly vulnerable.

Given those factors, levees in the New Orleans area likely will be topped.

Direct hit

New Orleans has not been directly hit by a major hurricane since Hurricane Betsy, a Category 3 storm, in 1965. Although levees have been improved since then, Louisiana has lost hundreds of square miles of wetlands and barrier islands, making New Orleans, most of which lies below sea level, far more vulnerable to a devastating storm.

High-rise office and apartment buildings were likely to sway dangerously, "a few to the point of total collapse," the service said.

The National Weather Service also warned that "blown debris will create additional destruction. Persons, pets and livestock exposed to the winds will face certain death if struck."

It was impossible to get a clear sense of how many people decided to ride out the storm. City streets were eerily quiet in most areas as businesses shut down and residents cleared out. While neutral grounds around the city were full of parked cars by early afternoon, most streets were nearly devoid of traffic, though the occasional pedestrian or bicyclist could be seen.

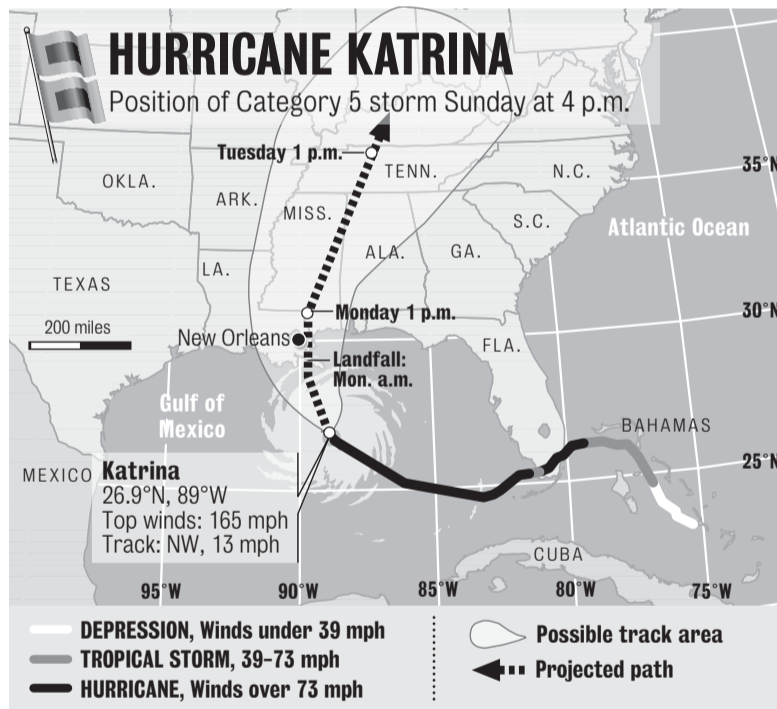
In a somewhat surreal morning news conference, Mayor Ray Nagin issued an emergency order giving state and local authorities the right to commandeer private buildings and vehicles — including boats — as they see fit. The mayor did not say which buildings might be seized for public use, but said that if the Superdome became too full, additional buildings might be needed for shelter.

Nagin also said the city has 30 boats at its disposal, but could need far more, depending on the water level in the city after the storm.

After the storm

While officials were mostly concerned about preparing for the storm's impact, there already was discussion of its aftermath.

Dan Packer, CEO of Entergy New Orleans, said extra crews from other areas Entergy serves already



STAFF GRAPHIC

are in the area, ready to begin repairs to what the company expects will be devastating storm damage.

The storm "may destroy the electrical distribution system in New Orleans and a good part of southeast Louisiana," he said. Packer said it may take weeks or months to rebuild the system.

Like Packer, the weather service warned of likely devastating power outages that could last for weeks, with power poles down and transformers destroyed. Most trees, the service predicted, would be snapped or uprooted; the heartiest, if they survive, would be stripped of all leaves.

The service also warned of devastation to buildings.

"At least one-half of well-constructed homes will have roof and wall failure," the service warned. "All gabled roofs will fail, leaving those homes severely damaged or destroyed."

As the city prepared to go into the bunker Sunday, airlines shut down their operations at Louis Armstrong International Airport and a Carnival cruise ship scheduled to end a one-week voyage in New Orleans was diverted to Galveston, Texas.

Officials in Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist and St. Tammany parishes called for mandatory evacuations of all or portions of these parishes.

Even Jefferson Parish, considered a more affluent and mobile community than New Orleans, opened three shelters of last resort Sunday afternoon at Bonnabel High School in

Kenner, Stella Worley Middle School in Westwego and Truman Middle School in Marrero.

Jefferson also used public transportation to pick up residents and take them to the shelters.

"Let's hope and pray," said parish President Aaron Broussard at an afternoon news conference from the West Bank Emergency Operations Center.

Although the newly developed contraflow plan was executed much more smoothly than in last year's debut, motorists still complained of slow going.

A Dome divided

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of less fortunate Orleanians, many of whom lack access to cars, hustled to the Superdome, the "shelter of last resort" that was opened to the public by city officials Sunday at noon. Nagin, who imposed a 6 p.m. curfew, warned residents not to expect comfortable conditions inside the Dome, saying power outages could last for days.

The Dome was set up as a divided safe haven, with one side of the facility for the disabled and medically ill, where food and water and emergency personnel were plentiful, officials said. For the masses of residents, however, there was the other side, where all that was provided was a concrete stadium built for athletes and spectators.

While conditions in the Dome were far from ideal, many locals waiting in the long line that circled Poydras Street were not complaining that their city had no more to offer

them.

"It's a safe haven," said Lee Andrews, 47, who accompanied his wife, Stephanie, and her sister and her sister's five children. "You can't expect to have everything."

Elsewhere around the city, for a few foolhardy souls — the number was hard to gauge, but it appeared relatively small — getting safe meant locking the doors and hoping that the vicious winds and high waters Katrina was expected to bring wouldn't prove fatal.

Among them was Dan Fuller, a 74-year-old artist that lives in his studio in Mid-City. Sunday afternoon, Fuller was rolling a suitcase down Canal Street, returning from an unsuccessful stint of hitchhiking at the intersection of Interstate 10 and City Park Avenue.

"I thought I would hitchhike and just count on people's generosity, but I can't say if they were generous or not — all their cars were full," he said.

Nagin warned Sunday morning in issuing his evacuation order that seawater pushed by the storm's winds was expected to top the city's complex levee system, pouring water into the city's many low-lying areas — something that hasn't happened since Betsy. Gov. Kathleen Blanco said models predicted water could be as deep as 20 feet in places, totally inundating some neighborhoods.

Such a doomsday scenario could result in thousands of deaths, depending on factors ranging from the storm's intensity when it hits the city and the number of people who evacuated.

At Memorial Hospital, employees streamed into the facility with cats and dogs and pillow in tow, taking advantage of the stout Napoleon Avenue institution's long-standing practice of providing a hurricane refuge to its workers and their pets.

Even as the window for evacuation began to slam shut, some Orleanians were making the decision to get out.

As an RTA bus prepared to take another load of residents to the Dome, a family of nine pulled up in a faded blue Ford pickup, with Eddie Mason driving. The back was packed with children along with clothes, blankets and other essentials.

"I think we'll be there three or four days," Mason said. "But then again, I think we might be spared. I really do. I just keep thinking it can't be as bad as they been saying it's going to be."

Staff writers Mark Schleifstein, Gwen Filosa, Coleman Warner and Brian Thevenot contributed to this report.

HURRICANE KATRINA



Field flooding, loss of power expected at Superdome



STAFF PHOTO BY TED JACKSON

The stress of evacuation takes hold as a family that had expected to join a relative closer to the front of the line at the Superdome is directed to the end of the line by a National Guardsman.

DOME, from A-1

other choice but to assemble outside the Louisiana Superdome, waiting in an unorganized line to take refuge in a sprawling building meant more for touchdowns than for emergencies.

Mayor Ray Nagin called the Superdome's opening as a shelter a "last resort." He didn't have to explain that to the hundreds of New Orleanians gathered about Poydras Street's sidewalks Sunday before noon.

In a city famed for its come-what-may attitude, the scene at the Superdome was somber, as the lines snaked inside.

"No funds," a 41-year-old woman surrounded by four children, ages 2 to 14, said when asked what brought her to the shelter. The woman didn't want to give her name as she waited with stacks of bedding and a few

children's toys resting on the sidewalk.

She stood beside her modest Chevy Nova, which she drove Sunday from their Marrero home to the Dome.

"I can't have them in all this water," the mother said of her children, explaining why she didn't choose to evacuate from the coming hurricane. If only things were different, she said, she would have reserved seats on a Trailways bus, or perhaps bought plane tickets. But she wasn't placing her children in a car for hours on end, she said.

"If I hadn't had to work last night, you wouldn't be seeing me here," said Arthur Simpson, 46, an Uptown resident who left his job as a printer in Harahan on Sunday at 6:30 a.m. and headed north.

But his run washed out in Hammond, while sitting in slow traffic. Instead of making it to Jackson, Miss., or Memphis, he said, he made

the biggest decision of his weekend: He turned around and sought shelter at the Dome.

By 3 p.m., more than 10,000 people were either outside the Dome in long, deep lines or had made their way inside. Those with medical illnesses or disabilities were funneled to one side of the makeshift shelter, equipped with supplies and medical personnel. The other side was a place to ride out the storm.

"The people arriving on this side of the building are expected to fend for themselves," said Terry Ebbert, the city's homeland security director. "We have some water."

About 150 National Guard soldiers, New Orleans police and civil sheriff's deputies were patrolling the facility. Some weapons were confiscated.

Officials were settling in for what they predicted would be an incredibly hot and uncomfortable night. They expected flooding on the field

and loss of power early today.

But officials were confident they could care for those with special needs.

"I'm not worried about what is tolerable or intolerable," he said. "I'm worried about, whether you are alive on Tuesday."

Kenneth Roby, 41, a bearded man in a black baseball cap, also worked Saturday night, as a dishwasher at Antoine's Restaurant in the French Quarter. Roby smiled gently as he surveyed the crowd about to enter the Superdome, which was tightly guarded by young men and women in Army fatigues. A guardsman shooed away reporters and those seeking shelter until noon time.

"Everything else is closed up," Roby said, sitting on his black duffel bag that he said held dirty clothes and little else. "You can't buy anything or get around like you usually do. Everybody is panicking. I'm not. I need some food. It wouldn't make

sense to shelter us" without providing water and food.

Roby, who grew up Uptown and lives in the 7th Ward, has spent time in homeless shelters before. He said the city could do more in times like Katrina. "This is the time they really need to help," he said of city leaders.

Geraldine Johnson, 67, has no car. So she and her 41-year-old daughter and three grandchildren, ages 8, 10 and 12, caught the bus from Algiers early Sunday and landed at the Dome after 11 a.m.

"This is my last resort," Johnson said, seated and surrounded by her family.

The children had their suitcases and snacks. "They may provide food," Johnson said. "But it would take so long to wait in that line. You can't depend on people to give you everything."

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Cruise diverted out of Katrina's path

Travelers bound for N.O. stuck in Galveston

By Coleman Warner
Staff writer

Hurricane Katrina's approach Sunday forced Carnival Cruise Lines to divert a cruise scheduled to end in New Orleans to Galveston, Texas, while an undetermined number of travelers were stranded at Louis Armstrong International Airport as operations came to a virtual halt.

The redirected cruise left thousands of Carnival travelers scrambling to make other airline connections in Houston.

After a seven-day Caribbean trip, the New Orleans-based Carnival Conquest, carrying more than 3,000 people, was scheduled to arrive at a



STAFF PHOTO BY JENNIFER ZDON

Tourists wait for taxis on Canal Street on Sunday. Some airlines had already begun canceling flights, leaving visitors stranded in a city under evacuation.

downtown wharf at 7 a.m., but the storm threat and the closure of the port forced the cruise ship to Galveston, arriving about 7:30 a.m., spokeswoman Jennifer ve la Cruz

said. "We're going to keep the ship docked in Galveston overnight, and people have the option of getting off today (Sunday) or getting off tomor-

row," she said. "We are running buses to the Houston airport."

Carnival gave each passenger a \$200 credit to help offset additional costs they might face in changing flight plans, and said anyone who booked flights through the Miami-based cruise line would not be charged fees for changes.

"In these storm situations the airlines tend to be quite flexible," ve la Cruz said.

Carnival also offered the passengers a 25 percent discount on a future cruise.

Passengers who left cars in New Orleans couldn't return immediately because they can't fly in, the spokeswoman said.

"They have to figure out what they want to do and where they're going to head to," she said.

Carnival's temporary port switch didn't jeopardize any other planned cruise by the Conquest because the ship is scheduled for maintenance work.

The ship's diversion offered a measure of good news on a bad-news day at the New Orleans airport. The missing Carnival passengers opened

up at least 1,000 seats for desperate passengers whose flights were disrupted or suspended, said airport spokeswoman Michelle Duffoure.

Among airlines serving New Orleans, Delta, United, US Airways, Northwest, American, AirTran, Southwest and Continental suspended flights at various times Sunday.

When regular flights resume will depend on how much hurricane damage the airport sustains and how long it takes for airlines and a federal agency in charge of security screening to get crews in place again, Duffoure said. Flight schedules aren't expected to resume until Tuesday at the earliest, she said.

"We don't know. We've never sustained one of these this strong," Duffoure said. "We're just trying to batten down the hatches and hope for the best."

Lakefront Airport, run by the Orleans Levee Board, also closed because of the storm threat.

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