

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Emilia Pastina

Hurricanes and oil could be a deadly environmental mix

If forecasters are right, it's going to be a rough hurricane season.

And with oil from a giant spill spreading over the Gulf of Mexico, that is potentially disastrous news.

The Climate Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently made its predictions for how many powerful "named" storms will form in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico this year.

The weather experts predict 14 to 23 named storms this hurricane season, which began June 1. That is the highest number since this U.S. agency began issuing seasonal predictions in 1998.

"If this outlook holds true, this season could be one of the more active on record," said Jane Lubchenco, NOAA chief, at a Washington, D.C., news conference. "The greater likelihood of storms brings an increased risk of a landfall. In short, we urge everyone to be prepared."

Forecasters do not predict how many storms will hit land. But they are predicting eight to 14 tropical storms will become hurricanes, with three to seven predicted to be "major" hurricanes with winds more than 111 miles per hour.

One of the reasons for the high numbers in the prediction is warm Atlantic Ocean water. According to the NOAA, sea surface temperatures are expected to remain higher than average this year — up to four degrees above normal.

Last year, forecasters predicted nine to 14 storms. The actual number was nine.

Bigger problems

If an "active" to "extremely active" hurricane season isn't bad enough, the massive Gulf oil spill is adding to worries about an environmental disaster.

Most hurricanes cover 200 to 300 miles of the ocean at a time. This is much wider than the current size of the spill, meaning there's a great chance a hurricane could roll right over the spill — especially if oil gets swept up by ocean currents and spread over a wider area.

If a hurricane hits a spill area, the wind and storm surges could send the oil over an even greater area, onto the coastline and even far inland.

"It would very definitely turn an environmental disaster into an

unprecedented environmental catastrophe," said Brian D. McNoldy, a tropical storms researcher at Colorado State University, in a New York Times article.

Naming storms

Often, more than one storm brews at a time. So to help meteorologists and weather experts identify and track storms, names are given each one from a list approved by the World Meteorological Organization.

Tropical storms are named when wind speed reaches 39 miles per hour. When the winds increase to 74 miles per hour, a storm is upgraded to a hurricane.

Storms are named alphabetically, leaving out letters Q, U, X, Y and Z.

Because of the languages of potential target countries, names of Atlantic storms can be French, Spanish or English.

This year's Atlantic storms will begin with Alex, Bonnie, Colin, Danielle, Earl and Fiona.

Other names on the list this year include Gaston, Igor and Tomas.

UPI Photo (Inset iStock Photo)



Oil-soaked birds are just one of the environmental problems that would get worse if a hurricane hit the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Talk About the News

- The 2010 hurricane season began June 1, and federal forecasters predict it will be “active” to “extremely active.” Many worry that the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico could cause even more problems if a hurricane were to roll over it. As a class, talk about the individual dangers of a hurricane and an oil spill. What could happen if the two met? Discuss what is being done to prepare and if you think it's enough. What else could be done?

Learning Standard: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences and working toward making decisions.

Explore Your e-Edition



- Experts say it's important to be prepared during hurricane season. Read today's e-Edition to find a story about a disaster or near-disaster, such as a house fire. How were the people involved prepared or unprepared? What could they or others learn from this event? Write a plan about how you could be prepared if the disaster of the story were to happen to your family.
- The Gulf oil spill continues to cause severe problems for the environment and for the people who earn their living from the sea. Read the latest news and opinion pieces in the e-Edition about the oil slick. Based on what you read, draw an editorial cartoon or write an editorial expressing your opinions about the environmental dangers, the role of the oil company BP or the U.S. government's role.

Learning Standards: Responding to a variety of oral, visual, written and electronic texts by making connections to students' personal lives and the lives of others; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

Learning Standards: Reading and writing fluently, speaking confidently, listening and interacting appropriately, viewing critically and representing creatively; utilizing the persuasive power of text as an instrument of change in the community, the nation and the world.

- Atlantic tropical storms and hurricanes have French, Spanish or English names. Skim today's e-Edition to find appropriate names for storms. Remember to put them in alphabetical order and not to use letters Q, U, X, Y and Z. Compare your ideas with those of your classmates. Graph which names were most popular.

Learning Standards: Acquiring information from multiple sources and then organizing and analyzing it; organizing data using tables, charts, graphs, spreadsheets and data bases; employing the most effective strategies to construct meaning while reading, listening to, viewing or creating texts.

How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about the 2010 hurricane season by answering the questions below.

1. According to the story, federal forecasters recently predicted the number of storms expected to:

- A. Cause damage on land
- B. Form in Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico
- C. Be a threat to wildlife
- D. Roll over the Gulf oil spill

2. The word “forecast” means to:

- A. Predict
- B. Make a law
- C. Warn
- D. Make up

3. According to the story, one reason for this year's hurricane forecast is because:

- A. More people are expected to go to the beach this summer
- B. The Gulf oil spill has not been cleaned up
- C. The Atlantic Ocean is expected to remain colder than average
- D. The Atlantic Ocean is expected to remain warmer than average

4. According to the story, U.S. hurricane winds rotate:

- A. North
- B. East
- C. Counter-clockwise
- D. Clockwise

5. According to the story, a tropical storm is upgraded to a hurricane when:

- A. A lot of destruction happens
- B. It hits land
- C. Winds reach 74 miles per hour
- D. It moves north