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Media Relations

UNH Climatologist Available To Discuss Track, Impact Of Hurricane Irene

August 24, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – Mary Stampone, assistant professor of geography at the University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire state climatologist, is available to discuss the track of Hurricane Irene and its possible impact in New Hampshire and New England.

According to Stampone, Hurricane Irene is forecast to become a major hurricane with maximum wind speeds of 125 mph by tonight as it moves over the Bahamas. The storm is expected to peak as a Category 4 hurricane by Thursday then weaken as it moves up the U.S. coast through Sunday.

"The one- to three-day track has a possible landfall along the North Carolina coast as a major hurricane with winds in excess of 110 mph. Given the uncertainty in the potential track area, the center of the storm could stay off the coast of North Carolina and the mid-Atlantic for a landfall along Long Island and the southern New England coast late Sunday or early Monday. If Irene tracks further east within the potential track area, it could make landfall as far east as Maine or Nova Scotia early Monday morning," Stampone said.

"Regardless of the storm track, New England should be prepared for gusty winds and heavy rainfall Sunday through Monday, with the potential for flooding in low-lying or coastal areas. Coastal wave heights will begin to increase along the coasts of Long Island, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and southern Maine overnight tonight. Offshore wave heights along southern New England will increase by Friday morning, with peak wave heights off the coast of Rhode Island and Massachusetts Sunday afternoon. Wave heights will increase within the Gulf of Maine overnight Saturday into Sunday, with peak wave heights occurring Sunday night into Monday morning," she said.

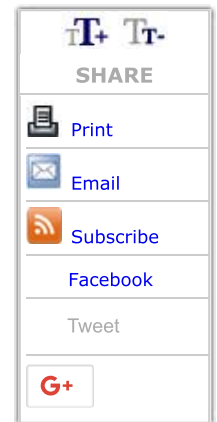
Since 1850, about 14 hurricanes (wind speeds of at least 74 mph) have made landfall along the southern coasts of Long Island and New England, Stampone said. Of these New England hurricanes, five crossed the state of New Hampshire as minimal hurricanes (wind speed of 74 to 110 mph), including the unnamed storms of September 1858 and 1869 as well as the more recent hurricanes Carol (1954), Donna (1960), and Gloria (1985). Other 20th century New England hurricanes to impact New Hampshire include the "Long Island Express" (1938), the "Great Atlantic Hurricane" (1944), and Hurricane Bob (1991).

"The vast majority of hurricane losses in New England occur along the more densely populated coastal areas of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts where most storms make landfall. While there is no record of a hurricane landfall along the New Hampshire coast, coastal areas and inland bays are susceptible to very strong winds, storm surge flooding, and erosion. Most hurricane hazards for inland portions of the state occur in response to heavy rainfall, which can cause significant flooding in low-lying areas," she said.

Stampone will provide data on Hurricane Irene on the New Hampshire State Climate Office website at <http://www.unh.edu/stateclimatologist/>. Information also is available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Hurricane Center at http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/graphics_at4.shtml?5-daynl#contents.

For information on what to do during a hurricane, visit http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/hu_during.shtml. For information on creating an emergency kit, visit <http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html>.

The New Hampshire State Climate Office (NHSCO) resides within the Department of Geography at the University of New Hampshire. The mission of the NHSCO is to serve the citizens of New Hampshire by providing access to climatological data and information, conducting climate-related research that is relevant to the needs of the state and its residents, and serving as a focal point for climate education and outreach.



The NHSCO is officially recognized by the American Association of State Climatologists and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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