

Slow-moving tropical storm nears Bermuda

by AP-News

HAMILTON, Bermuda (AP) — Tropical Storm Bertha kicked up deadly surf as far away as New Jersey on Sunday and threatened to lash Bermuda with rain and high winds in the next 24 hours.

Several business owners in this British Atlantic territory said they planned to send workers home by noon Monday as a preventive measure, while residents began taping windows and securing boats.

"Bermudians are pretty used to this," said local resident Ruth O'Kelly-Lynch, 25. "We've been through this several times, so everyone's relaxed but prepared."

The storm apparently played a role in the deaths of three swimmers along the New Jersey coast, where the U.S. National Weather Service said Bertha created tricky waves and currents.

Authorities said one man drowned and another was missing and feared dead following a Saturday evening swim off the Wildwood beach. A third man died the same day after being plucked from a rip current in Atlantic City, though doctors said Sunday night that he died of natural causes rather than drowning.

The slow-moving, meandering Bertha was expected to start moving northwest at about 2 mph (4 kph) Sunday night, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said. The center's projections show Bertha sideswiping Bermuda on Monday, a day later than earlier forecasts, and dumping 2 to 4 inches of rain.

JetBlue canceled Monday flights from Bermuda to Boston and New York, while American Airlines passengers scheduled to travel to Miami and New York that day were flown out on Sunday. British Airways said it would announce Monday whether it will cancel an evening flight to London.

Over the weekend, most tourists avoided the storm-whipped surf and rip currents along Bermuda's southern coast. Authorities posted signs announcing beach closures.

By Sunday night, the storm's maximum sustained winds had decreased to near 65 mph (100 kph). Bertha was centered about 170 miles (275 kilometers) southeast of Bermuda.

Bermuda native Mikaela Ian Pearman, 22, who lives on the island's eastern end, worried that the causeway that links her to the main island will close, preventing her from reaching the capital if she gives birth on her due date next Saturday.

"It scares me because of the fact that 'I don't do pain,'" she said, adding that she might stay with someone in Hamilton so she doesn't get trapped.

Bertha became the Atlantic season's first hurricane on July 7.

In the Pacific, Tropical Storm Elida swirled about 245 miles (395 kilometers) southwest of Acapulco, Mexico, on Sunday, and was headed farther out to sea. The hurricane center said Elida had sustained winds of nearly 65 mph (100 kph) and was traveling northwest at 14 mph (22 kph).

Large swells and high surf could reach Mexico's southwestern coast in coming days, the center said.

Copyright © 2008 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Slow-moving tropical storm nears Bermuda by AP-News