

Britain and the Netherlands brace for worst storm in years

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USPA News - Weather warnings were issued in parts of Britain and the Netherlands on Sunday in anticipation of the region's worst storm in years, bringing heavy rain and very strong winds that may cause structural damage and travel disruption. France, Belgium and Denmark are also affected.

The intense low pressure system, which was still developing on Sunday, began to affect parts of England and Wales on late Sunday afternoon. It is expected to run northeastwards, across England and Wales on Monday morning, with very strong winds on its southern and western flanks. "The Met Office has been predicting this severe storm for several days now, and at long last we can see a large area of clouds where the storm is developing and this will move towards the UK, arriving on our shores in the southwest around midnight tonight," said Chief Forecaster Nick Grahame. Grahame warned people in the southern parts of the United Kingdom to prepare for gusts of 96 to 112 kilometers (60 to 70 miles) per hour, and locally more than 128 kilometers (80 miles) per hour. The strongest winds will likely affect southern and southwestern coasts, which will also experience large waves. "There remains slight uncertainty in the timing, intensity and track of the low as well as the northern limit of the strongest winds," the Met Office, which issued its second-highest level of alert, said. "However, the public should be prepared for the risk of falling trees as well as damage to buildings and other structures, bringing disruption to transport and power supplies." Heavy rain will accompany the storm, with a chance of some localized surface water flooding in parts of England and Wales. Grahame said the agency expects the British areas affected by the storm to experience as much as 20 to 40 millimeters (0.78 to 1.57 inch) of rain within 9 hours. Britain last experienced similar wind strengths in March 2008, but forecasters said the damage is expected to be worse as trees are in leaf. "While this is a major storm for the UK, we don't currently expect winds to be as strong as those seen in the 'Great Storm' of 1987 or the 'Burns Day storm' of 1990," said Martin Young, another Chief Forecaster at the Met Office. Earlier on Sunday, British Prime Minister David Cameron chaired a call with various government departments and agencies to discuss plans in place to ensure people are protected from Monday's storm. He also received an update from the Met Office and Environment Agency about the risk of the storm, which has been dubbed "St. Jude" by local media. "Transport Ministers, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Office updated the Prime Minister on preparations and contingency planning around transport, local authorities, schools, health and power supplies," Downing Street said in a statement. "The Prime Minister heard that the storm could have a widespread impact, but that transport providers, local government, emergency services and power companies have plans in place to respond." As the storm began to affect the coasts of southern England and Wales by late Sunday evening, emergency services were called to a beach in East Essex where a 14-year-old boy was swept out to sea while swimming at the shore with friends. A major search and rescue operation was immediately launched, but there was no sign of the child. "This is a very distressing incident and everything possible is being done to try to find the boy," a Sussex Police spokesman said, adding that the boy's friends were able to return to the shore safely. Chief Inspector Katy Woolford said other people had also been seen "dangerously" close to the water and urged them to stay away. Forecasters in the Netherlands were also expecting a major storm to affect the country's western and northern coasts. The Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) warned for gusts of 100 to 120 kilometers (62 to 74 miles) per hour, with gusts up to 130 kilometers (80.7 miles) per hour along coastal areas in the northwest. Extreme weather warnings were in effect for all coastal areas of the Netherlands, but inland areas such as the capital Amsterdam were also in the warning area. The agency said the strongest winds were expected on late Monday morning and early Monday afternoon, with the winds dying down later in the afternoon. Airports and rail companies in both Britain and the Netherlands were warning of travel disruption as a result of the severe storm. Forecasters also warned for strong winds and heavy rain in northern parts of France, specifically coastal areas in the northwest. Weather warnings were also issued for nearly all regions of Belgium, where forecasters warned of gusts up to 120 kilometers (74 miles) per hour in coastal areas. After the storm passes over Britain and the Netherlands, the storm will hit parts of Denmark on late Monday afternoon and early Monday evening. "The storm is expected to slow through the course of Monday evening and early Tuesday, firstly in the western part of the country," the country's weather service said.

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