Hurricane Harvey: The Costliest Disaster in United States’ History

AccuWeather’s Superior Accuracy™ Provided the Critical Time and Actionable Information to Prepare For and Mitigate the Disaster

Friday, August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey roared ashore near Port Aransas, Texas, as a Category 4 hurricane with wind gusts to 132 mph. Harvey also caused catastrophic flooding throughout southeast Texas with rainfall amounts up to 64.58 inches at Nederland (east of Houston) during the record five-day rainfall deluge.

The onslaught of wind and water from Harvey caused $198 billion dollars damage in Texas alone. It is the most costly disaster in the history of the United States.

In spite of the unprecedented nature of the storm, AccuWeather Enterprise Solutions furnished specific, actionable information to our clients that allowed them to mitigate its effects on their businesses and their families.

Timeline of Hurricane Harvey-related events:

These dramatic, and ultimately accurate, forecasts were indispensable to mitigating Harvey’s effects so that the magnitude of the disaster could be envisioned and anticipated, especially since it had been more than a decade since a Category 4 hurricane had struck the United States.

Friday, August 18: Seven Days Before Landfall
AccuWeather began projecting that Harvey might curve northward and threaten the western or central Gulf Coast. This forecast was distributed the day before the National Weather Service’s National Hurricane Center (NHC) began mentioning the threat in its forecast messages.

Sunday, August 20: Five Days Before Landfall
AccuWeather published a news story on AccuWeather.com advising Texas residents to monitor the progress of Harvey and its attendant risk of flooding. This was prior to similar messages from the NHC.

"We were out in front of this one thanks to your advanced forecasting!"

"I confirmed we’re receiving all the notifications as expected. We’ve activated our Emergency Operations Center plans in preparation for the expected hurricane. The forecasting has been greatly valued as the threat approaches."

"Thanks! So far everything we have been getting is awesome... Our conference calls have been going on and will go on throughout the event. I have been keeping the field updated. I’ll put up the SkyGuard and send that as well... Thanks for checking on us!"

Tuesday, August 22: Three Days Before Landfall
We first warned of flash and river flooding in southeast Texas while making a nearly perfect forecast of Harvey’s future landfall north of Corpus Christi. Our forecast called for 8 to 16 inches of rain through the 26th with a “high” flood potential beyond the 26th through the 30th of August.
On the 22nd, in another update, we forecasted, “rainfall would lead to widespread flooding and significant travel disruption, as some roads and bridges may be forced to close.” Our expert meteorologists also warned of coastal flooding and power outages.

These forecasts were available to our clients two crucial days earlier than similar forecasts from the NHC, giving them extra time for preparations.

Wednesday, August 23, Two Days Before Landfall
Seven critical hours before the NHC, AccuWeather provided detailed warnings that “dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding and river flooding will occur.” No equivocation. Our forecasts further went on to state that the flood threat would later shift into Louisiana during the weekend. The Houston-area forecasts were upgraded to specify a phenomenal 16 to 32 inches of rain. Our expert meteorologists made this bold and gutsy forecast, emphasizing that the flooding forecasts would be extensive and long-lasting.

Thursday, August 24, The Day Before Landfall
We warned of “catastrophic” flooding (see map below, left) for the area that was ultimately affected. The forecasted rainfall was raised to predict rainfalls “would exceed 24 inches” – again, an unprecedented, gutsy call. This was one day before similar forecasts from the NHC.

From Thursday morning forward, Harvey began to rapidly intensify. When it came ashore along the central Texas coast Friday evening, it collapsed buildings and knocked out power over a wide area. The deluge began Saturday and continued for days. Thirty-two thousand people were housed in emergency shelters.

On September 1, AccuWeather’s team of experts forecasted $190 billion in damage from Hurricane Harvey, an amount significantly higher than other initial estimates. These estimates were critical for use by our insurance clientele and others in order to size the resources necessary for recovery from the storm.

Seventy-one people were killed by the storm. According to Ball State University, Harvey caused 198 billion in damage in Texas alone (note: there was additional damage in Louisiana). Their inflation-adjusted damage calculation of Hurricane Katrina is $194 billion. That makes Harvey the worst natural disaster in the history of North America and the United States.

AccuWeather’s meteorologists conducted dozens of conference calls, client briefings, and special and routine forecasts and warnings throughout this period. In return, we received not only high praise (see testimonials on previous page) but King Cakes from our client, Tulane University and Medical Center.

When a natural disaster threatens, minutes and hours count. Turn to AccuWeather, the World’s Weather Authority®, to protect your people, your property and your profits.