

San Jacinto River Authority Kids Page

2013 HURRICANE SEASON IS HERE !



As summer approaches each year, Texas residents begin thinking about the possibility of a hurricane occurring. The “official” hurricane season begins June 1st and continues through November 30th. That doesn’t mean that such a storm cannot occur at other times, but these months are when most hurricanes -- or tropical cyclones -- form in the Atlantic.

Here are some frequently asked questions about these massive storms:

What exactly is a hurricane?

A hurricane is a huge storm that can be as wide as 600 miles across with wind speeds up to 200 miles per hour.

The word “hurricane” comes from an old Spanish word, “huracan”, that Spaniards used to refer to evil spirits and the weather gods. In fact, the word may have originated in Mayan mythology as the name of their storm god.

How do hurricanes form?

Hurricanes can only form over very warm water -- at least 80 degrees Fahrenheit on the surface and 150 feet below it. They can last over a week, and travel 10 to 20 miles an hour over the open ocean, gathering heat and energy from the warm ocean waters. Hurricanes also gain power from evaporating sea water, forced upward by winds coming together above the water. This humid air forms the storm clouds. They rotate in a counter-clockwise direction around an “eye”, or the calm, center of the storm. When hurricanes make landfall, heavy rains, wind, and large waves can cause significant damage.

How do they get their names?

Names have been given to Atlantic hurricanes for more than 100 years. People living in the Caribbean Islands named the storms after the Saint of the day on which it occurred. In the U.S., storms were identified by the latitude/longitude location where they originated. These methods were difficult to remember and communicate. During World War II, military meteorologists in the Pacific came up with the idea of using women’s names for the storms and this caught on so well that in 1953 this naming method was adopted by the National Hurricane Center for storms originating in the Atlantic Ocean. Soon these names became part of our ‘language’ and helped increase the awareness of these dangerous weather events. In 1979, men’s names were also included in the list. If a named storm is particularly

destructive, the name is “retired” and dropped from the list to be sensitive to people who suffered losses. Katrina, for example, was removed from the list. The first 5 names for the 2013 season are: Andrea, Barry, Chantal, Dorian, and Erin.

How do experts predict how many -- and what intensity -- storms will occur in one season?

In advance of Hurricane Season, groups of noted experts, scientific agencies and meteorological services (such as the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or NOAA, and the National Hurricane and Climate Prediction Center) release their forecasts of the number and kind of storm activity. These “guestimates” are based state-of-the-scientific techniques and key information such as patterns of ocean temperatures in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Once a storm has formed, NOAA’s “hurricane hunters” -- pilots who fly planes carrying radar, sophisticated computers, instruments to measure temperature, air pressure, wind speed, and direction -- venture into the storm to get an up close look at its structure and intensity. This information is used to warn people of the storm’s path.

How many storms are predicted for 2013?

This year, most of the experts agree that there will be an extremely active Hurricane Season: 15-18 named storms; seven to nine hurricanes, with three to five of them major. They suggest a high probability of a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast and East Coast. The average season brings 11 named storms, six hurricanes, and two major hurricanes. 💧

