

Beat: Travel

Brewing storm off Florida expected to become season's first

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USPA News - A weather system located off the coast of northeastern Florida continued to become better organized on Sunday, with forecasters now expecting it to become the Atlantic season's first tropical storm within the next few days, posing a threat to the U.S. state. Forecasters at the National Hurricane (NHC) have been following the system since early Friday morning when it emerged as a non-tropical area of low pressure over South Carolina.

The low moved offshore of the southeastern United States over the weekend as it slowly became better organized. By Sunday afternoon, the weather system was located approximately 230 miles (370 kilometers) east of St. Augustine, a city in northeastern Florida. "Satellite wind data and surface observations indicate that the low pressure system is gradually becoming better defined as it moves slowly southward to southwestward," said NHC senior hurricane specialist Stacy Stewart. Stewart said a tropical depression was expected to form on Monday or Tuesday, and weather models indicate it may become a tropical storm soon after that. This would make it the first tropical system of the Atlantic hurricane season and also mark the latest start of an Atlantic hurricane season since 2004. "However, the system's proximity to dry air could inhibit significant development until environmental conditions become more conducive by late Tuesday while the low meanders offshore of the Florida east coast," Stewart explained. He added that an Air Force Reserve reconnaissance aircraft may be sent to investigate the weather system on Monday morning. If a tropical storm develops as expected, model tracks indicate that it could make landfall in Florida by late Tuesday evening or early Wednesday morning, but the track remained uncertain as other weather models pointed towards the system staying offshore Florida before it moves up along the U.S. East Coast. According to a forecast released in late May, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center is expecting a below-normal hurricane season in the Atlantic this year. The outlook calls for 8 to 13 named storms, with 3 to 6 becoming hurricanes and one or two of those expected to become a major hurricane (category 3 or higher). Based on the period from 1981 to 2010, an average Atlantic hurricane season produces 12 named storms, with 6 becoming hurricanes and 3 becoming major hurricanes. The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 through November 30, with peak activity between August and October.

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