Looking Ahead to the 2026 Atlantic Basin Hurricane Season

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Outlook for 2026

Last year's hurricane season (2025) was less busy than predicted before the season got underway and the forecast versus actual activity is shown on the following table. This table also shows the actual number of storms that did occur in 2025.

The 2026 pre-season predictions suggest a moderately active year, similar moderate to last year's season– again just under the 30 year averages.

	2025 Predictions	2025 Actual	30 Year Average	2026 CSU Predictions	TWC 2026 Predictions
Total Named Storms	18	13	14	13	12
Hurricanes	9	5	7	6	6
Major Hurricanes (Cat 3-5)	4	4	3	2	2

ACE Index (*Accumulated Cyclonic Energy*)

The ACE index is a different way to measure how active a season is.

Short for Accumulated Cyclone Energy index, ACE takes into account not just the number of storms in a season, but also the intensity and longevity of storms and hurricanes.

ACE seems to provide a more balanced assessment as to the intensity of one hurricane season versus another.

However, it is certainly subjective as to whether a few extremely strong storms is better or worse than several medium strength storms.

CSU's ACE forecast for 2026 is 90 which is much lower that the 30 year average of 123. The 2025 actual ACE index was 130 – higher than average due to three very strong category 5 hurricanes.

When Does Hurricane Season Begin?

The official onset of Hurricane Season in the Atlantic Basin is June 1, with the official season ending November 30.

However, there are numerous examples of tropical events in the Atlantic basin occurring prior to June 1 and after November 30.

2026 Storm Names

Once a tropical system reaches tropical storm intensity (winds of 39 MPH or more), it will be assigned the next name from the following list

Arthur	Bertha	Cristobal
Dolly	Edouard	Fay
Gonzalo	Hanna	Isaias
Josephine	Kyle	Leah
Marco	Nana	Omar
Paulette	Rene	Sally
Teddy	Vicky	Wilfred

If there are more than 21 named storms, subsequent storms will take names from an auxiliary list. This use of Greek alphabet names was discontinued after the 2020 season.

Link to Our Tropical Weather Tracking Page

The link to our 2026 Storm Tracking Home Page follows:

http://www.rexross.com/StormCentral_2026.html

You can bookmark and check that link anytime for the latest, up to date tropical activity.

Definitions of Storm Categories

The following chart shows the wind speed and typical storm surge associated with each Category of tropical event.

Storm Categories and Standard Parameters		
Hurricane Category	**Wind Speed**	**Typical Storm Surge**
Tropical Storm	39 - 73 mph	
1	74 - 95 mph	4 - 5 feet
2	96 - 110 mph	6 - 8 feet
3	111 - 129 mph	9 - 12 feet
4	130 - 156 mph	13 - 18 feet
5	Over 156 mph	19 feet of higher

Hurricane Category Levels Remain Under Review

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that wind speed alone is not a definitive determinant of the destructive power of a tropical event.

The size of the storm surge is, in many cases, equally or even more important than wind speed. This view, while long known, came to the forefront as a result of hurricane Ike which struck the Galveston area in 2008. While the wind speed never got beyond a Category 2 event, the size of the storm's wind field produced an enormous storm surge more commonly associated with a Category 4 hurricane. The storm surge statistics for Ike were:

- Highest storm surge recorded on Galveston Island since 1915
- 12-15 foot Ike storm surge along the Galveston / Houston coastal area
- 15-17 foot Ike storm surge across Bolivar Peninsula

Reliance only on the Category 2 wind speeds that occurred, would have indicated that a storm surge of only 6-8 feet might have been expected.

Clearly that was not the case.

The National Hurricane Center is still working on how to better classify the potential effects of a storm beyond the simple wind speed-based Category designation. To that end, the NHC is now also publishing storm surge prediction maps as part of their forecast, but they remain a little hard to read and interpret for now.

The message here is to pay attention to all aspects of the forecast for a tropical event, not just the wind speed predictions.

Click to view video of the impact of Hurricane Ike on Galveston in 2008

What Large Scale Factors Affect the Number and Intensity of Storms?

Two significant factors which affect the number and intensity of storms that form are:

- The El Niño / La Niña Effect
- Sea Surface Temperatures

El Niño / La Niña Effects

El Niño and La Niña are climate patterns in the Pacific Ocean that can affect weather worldwide.

The occurrence of an El Niño event typically results in increased wind shear in the Atlantic. Such wind shear often limits or suppresses the formation of storms. Without that El Niño driven wind shear, storms are more likely to form and strengthen as they cross the Southern Atlantic

without their tops being blown off (which tends to cause the developing storms to weaken and/or dissipate).

Conversely, La Niña Atlantic hurricane seasons have less wind shear that can otherwise rip storms apart and more rising, unstable air that is more conducive for thunderstorms, the building blocks of tropical storms and hurricanes.

2026 El Niño /La Niño Forecast

According to the center's latest report, the ENSO system — which includes both El Niño and La Niña — is currently in a neutral phase. However, climate models indicate a probability of more than 60% that El Niño will develop between late spring and summer of 2026, with the potential to persist through the end of the year.

Even so, experts emphasize that these forecasts should be interpreted with caution.

Current projections could change significantly in the coming months.

Beyond the inherent uncertainty in forecasts, current oceanic and atmospheric conditions are already showing meaningful signals. These include the gradual warming of waters in the equatorial Pacific, the presence of wind anomalies — particularly westerly winds — and the buildup of heat beneath the ocean surface

Sea Surface Temperatures

As of mid-April 2026, the Atlantic hurricane basin is experiencing high sea surface temperatures (SSTs), with many areas exceeding $80°$F which is conducive to tropical development.

While early season, water temperatures in the Main Development Region (MDR) of the Atlantic and the Caribbean remain significantly warm.

What Does All This Mean for the United States?

There is no strong correlation between the number of storms or hurricanes and U.S. landfalls in any given season.

One or more of the named storms predicted to develop this season could hit the U.S. Conversely, all tropical events may avoid land, remaining out to sea.

While probabilities of a strike along the lower east coast, the upper east coast and along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico are made each year, they are not very reliable and are not included here.

The uncertainty as to whether and where any storm might make a landfall is why residents of the coastal U.S. should prepare each year no matter what the overall forecast may be.

Remember:

- Regardless of the pre-season predictions, it only takes only one storm event impacting your area of interest to make the season an unpleasant one.

- So, it is important for all those with interests along the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico or Caribbean coastal zones to pay close attention to any tropical systems which may possibly affect those locations and to have a storm preparation and evacuation plan in place.