

In Havana, tobacco crops spared from floods

MIAMI HERALD
JUN. 13, 2006

HAVANA - (AP) -- Tropical Storm Alberto drenched western Cuba on Monday after a weekend of heavy rains prompted evacuations, destroyed dilapidated buildings and flooded low-lying areas in Havana.

A few old buildings around Havana crumbled in the heavy rains, the official Prensa Latina news agency reported -- a common occurrence during storms. There were no reports of other major damage or injuries.

"The intensity of the rains has diminished, although in some localized areas of Pinar del Rio they could remain heavy, as well as in the Havana area and on the Isle of Youth," Cuba's National Meteorology Institute said in a statement.

Some areas of Pinar del Río province near Havana lost electricity for up to 12 hours, the official daily newspaper Granma reported.

Granma said heavy rains caused damage in some agricultural regions, but Cuba's most important crop -- tobacco -- was unaffected because the harvest has been completed, with the leaves used to make the island's famed cigars safe and dry inside curing houses.

More than 12 inches of rain fell in some rural areas over the weekend, Prensa Latina said.

Under the country's civil defense plan, nearly 25,000 people on the island's west end were urged to leave their homes as a precaution to stay with friends and relatives on higher ground.

They included high school students at rural boarding schools who are often sent home during tropical cyclones to stay with their families until the storms pass.

State television warned people to stay away from swollen rivers and overflowing reservoirs.