

As storm passes, Cuba, Haiti begin cleaning up

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Clean-ups began in Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic Tuesday as a weakened Tropical Storm Ernesto left those Caribbean nations with some flooding and wind damage but no serious damages.

Ernesto moved over open seas after drenching eastern Cuba and began strengthening on a northbound track. It was expected to hit South Florida with intermittent heavy rain and blustery wind conditions through Wednesday.

"Ernesto Has Left," Granma, Cuba's Communist Party daily, said in a front page headline Tuesday morning.

All tropical storm warnings for the island were lifted by early morning and no major damage was documented. However, flooding was a problem in some cities along the eastern part of the island. The southeastern province of Guantánamo was soaked with nearly eight inches of rain.

Authorities said efforts were concentrated on eliminating mosquito breeding grounds. Large outbreaks of dengue fever were reported on the island even before the storm.

"We are immersed in cleanup and hygiene efforts that began prior to the arrival of Ernesto to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds," Granma reported. "Those labors will continue as part of recovery efforts following the storm."

Some of the nearly 620,000 people evacuated from their homes around the eastern region began to return home Tuesday, according to Cuban news media.

In one bit of positive news from the storm, some reservoirs in the drought-plagued eastern region were filled to 100 percent for the first time in a decade, Granma reported.

Ernesto left Cuba in the predawn hours, exiting through Cayo Romano, one of several islets along the northeastern coast, just north of Ciego de Avila.

No casualties were reported in Cuba or the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, two storm-related deaths were reported.

Recovery efforts also began in Haiti, battered by Ernesto Sunday with strong winds and rainfall.

"The only damage was limited to the south of Haiti where there was a lot of wind damage," Fred Blaise, a spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping mission said in a telephone interview. "But there is nothing on a major scale."

Ernesto also isolated the southern portion of the region when heavy rains severely damaged a bridge in Grand Goave. The bridge, located on a main road, connects Port-au-Prince with the south.