

# Hurricane Dean hits Mexico

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TECOLUTLA, Mexico --

Hurricane Dean struck the Mexican mainland Wednesday for a second time after battering oil platforms in the Gulf and forcing thousands to flee.

The sprawling storm made landfall near the port of Tecolutla in Veracruz state on the central Gulf coast as a Category 2 hurricane with maximum sustained winds reaching 100 mph.

It quickly weakened, with its winds falling to 85 mph and Category 1 status, as it pushed inland.

Dean's center hit the tourism and fishing town of Tecolutla just hours after civil defense workers in yellow raincoats loaded the remaining residents onto army trucks for a trip to inland shelters. But there was no escaping the sprawling storm's hurricane-force winds, which lashed at least 60 miles of the Veracruz coast.

Heavy rains caused rivers to rise in a region that saw hundreds die due to flooding and landslides in 1999.

Officials said they had received no reports of deaths in the Yucatan Peninsula, although driving rain, poor communications and impassable roads made it difficult to determine how isolated Mayan communities fared in the sparsely populated jungle. Earlier, Dean killed 13 people in the Caribbean.

Magdalena Gonzalez, 55, clutched a black plastic bag of belongings as she waited for the ride to a shelter, torn between fear of the storm and concern for what she leaves behind.

"I'm afraid it's going to take my house," she said.

South of Veracruz state, the storm surge flooded Ciudad del Carmen, a city of 120,000 people.

Dean became the third most intense Atlantic hurricane to make landfall in recorded history when it plowed into the Yucatan Peninsula on Tuesday as a ferocious Category 5 storm. It toppled trees, power lines and houses - but spared glitzy resorts on the Mayan Riviera.

Greatly weakened from that overland journey, Dean moved across the Bay of Campeche in the southern Gulf of Mexico, home to more than 100 oil platforms, three major oil exporting ports and the Cantarell oil field, Mexico's most productive.

The entire field's operations were shut down just ahead of the storm, reducing daily production by 2.7 million barrels of oil and 2.6 billion cubic feet of natural gas.

Seventy percent of the oil city of Ciudad del Carmen was flooded, Campeche state Gov. Jorge Carlos Hurtado told Mexico's Televisa network.

The last tourists departed Tuesday from the beaches of Tecolutla, while residents boarded up doors and windows on hotels facing the beach.

"It wasn't minutes of terror. It was hours," said Catharine Morales, 30, a native of Montreal, Canada, who has lived in Majahual for a year. "The walls felt like they were going to explode."

Morales weathered the storm in her new brick-walled house with her husband and 7-month-old daughter, Luna. Dean blew out the windows and pulled pieces from their roof.

But they fared better than most: Hundreds of homes in the Caribbean town of Majahual collapsed as Dean crumpled steel girders, splintered wooden structures and washed away about half of the immense concrete dock that transformed the sleepy fishing village into Mexico's second-busiest cruise ship destination.

The storm surge covered almost the entire town in waist-deep sea water, said fishermen Jorge Gonzalez, 29. He found refuge in the back room of a beachfront store whose steel security curtains were blown out, and had to help his dog Camilo keep his head above the rising tide.

"There came a moment when I thought this was the end," Gonzalez said.

Hurricane-force winds could strike as far north to La Cruz, about 200 miles south of Texas, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

Dean's projected path is 400 miles south of Texas, where only heavy surf was expected. The space shuttle Endeavour landed Tuesday - a day early - because of the threat NASA once feared Dean would pose to Mission Control in Houston.