

Henriette heads for mainland

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CABO SAN LUCAS, Mexico --

Hurricane Henriette threatened Mexico's mainland Wednesday as it stayed on track for the southwestern United States, while the weakening remnants of Hurricane Felix dumped heavy rain in Central America, causing flooding, landslides and at least nine deaths.

Henriette, which killed at least seven people in its run along Mexico's coast, struck Los Cabos at the tip of the Baja California peninsula on Tuesday.

It remained dangerous as it moved over open water on a track to hit the Mexican mainland later Wednesday with sustained winds of 75 mph, about 300 miles south of the Arizona border.

At 11 a.m. EDT, Henriette was centered about 70 miles west-northwest of Los Mochis on the Mexican mainland and it was moving north at 12 mph along a swampy coastal zone of farming and fishing towns.

The National Hurricane Center in Miami said Henriette could bring as much as a foot of rain in isolated areas and cause flash flooding. It was expected to weaken over Mexico's deserts and dump an inch or two of rain on southwestern New Mexico on Thursday or Friday.

Felix killed at least nine people, left 11 missing and destroyed about 5,000 homes when it slammed into Nicaragua's remote Miskito Coast on Tuesday as a powerful Category 5 hurricane with 160 mph winds and pushed inland, dumping heavy rains.

The dead included a man who drowned when his boat capsized, a woman killed when a tree fell on her house, and a girl who died shortly after being born because the storm prevented her from getting medical attention. Nearly every building in the region was damaged or destroyed.

Felix peeled roofs off shelters and knocked down electric poles in the region, which has about 60,000 residents and 12,000 homes,

In Puerto Cabezas, the region's main town near where Felix made landfall, the hospital was flooded. That forced officials in the fishing town to set up a makeshift medical center in a university building, where doctors were trying to save a 12-year-old boy who was gravely injured by a falling tree.

Other patients included a 17-year-old who was trapped when part of her home's roof collapsed as she tried to get her 14-month-old daughter out of the house. The baby was unharmed.

Nicaragua's government declared its northern Caribbean region a disaster area and was airlifting sheets, mattresses, food, first aid and other help to Puerto Cabezas. Some 15,800 of the area's 60,000 residents remained in 76 makeshift shelters.

While Felix dissipated over western Honduras, at least five nations in Central America were on alert for floods. As much as 25 inches of rain was forecast in some remote areas.

Streets were deserted and a steady rain fell as dawn broke Wednesday in Honduras, where 27,000 people have been evacuated.

"Thank God we are OK and nothing major has happened yet," said Jose Adolfo Mairena, a 49-year-old taxi driver in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, where the storm passed overnight. "But we are still keeping an eye on things."

Honduran emergency official Marcos Burgos said the worst apparently was over. "We may still have flooding, but we don't think it will be severe," he said.

In San Pedro Sula, in northern Honduras, Margoth Reyes, 41, ventured out at daylight to check damage to her one-story home. "The important thing is that the family is OK," she said.

Nervous residents still remember Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which parked over Central America for days, causing flooding and mudslides that killed nearly 11,000 people and left more than 8,000 missing.

Eight hours after Felix hit land in Central America on Tuesday, Henriette's eye struck Baja California - the first time Atlantic and Pacific hurricanes made landfall the same day, according to records dating back to 1949.

A moderate, magnitude-5 earthquake struck the Gulf of California before dawn Wednesday near where Henriette was passing, but no damage or injuries were reported.