

# Lorenzo lashes Mexico's coast

The Miami Herald  
Sep. 28, 2007

SAN RAFAEL, Mexico --

Hurricane Lorenzo crashed into Mexico's Gulf coast before dawn Friday, ripping apart shacks, sending billboards flying through the air and causing a landslide that claimed three lives.

The storm brought steady rain to much of central Mexico. In Puebla state, a saturated hillside collapsed, killing a woman and two children.

Following roughly the same path as deadly Hurricane Dean in August, Lorenzo quickly weakened to a tropical storm that moved inland and drenched Veracruz state's lush mountains. Rivers snaking through the countryside quickly filled with roaring water.

The storm battered a coastline populated with small fishing villages and beach hotels, knocking over electrical poles and leaving about 5,000 people in shelters scattered throughout the region.

In the farming town of San Rafael, residents were scooping water out of flooded homes and trying to keep their belongings dry as a nearby river threatened to overflow its banks. Many residents lost their banana, orange and lime crops to Hurricane Dean, and were still cleaning up from that storm when Lorenzo hit.

Maya Luisa Hernandez, 78, spent the night at a makeshift shelter set up at city hall. Her corrugated tin shack was destroyed by Dean, and she was trying to return home Friday to see if she had again lost her rebuilt home and few belongings.

"I'm worried because I don't know anything about my things," she said. "I put them up high, but the river is going to overflow its banks."

Lorenzo rapidly strengthened into a Category 1 hurricane on Thursday, then made landfall southeast of Tuxpan, the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said. It was expected to continue to weaken as it moved over land Friday.

The storm battered a section of coastline populated with small fishing villages and beach hotels popular with local tourists, leaving about 5,000 people in shelters scattered throughout the region. Electrical poles were knocked down, isolated landslides were reported, and streets filled with water as the storm dumped a steady rain.

However, no major injuries or deaths were reported.

Jose Reyes, a desk clerk at Hotel Riviera in Tuxpan, said the small port city appeared to have escaped most of the storm's wrath.

"There's just rain, nothing but rain," he said.

Residents scrambled late Thursday to move furniture and belongings to higher ground even as roads began to flood.

"We never expected the hurricane would hit here," said Ribay Peralta, a 33-year-old lawyer who was packing his car with televisions sets, DVD players and other appliances in the town of San Rafael, a low-lying community about nine miles from Veracruz's coast. "San Rafael is a town that gets flooded easily."

Forecasters said Lorenzo could dump 5 to 10 inches of rain in Veracruz, with isolated downpours reaching 15 inches. The area is vulnerable to heavy rain. In 1999, flooding killed at least 350 people.

"What worries us is overflowing rivers and steep hillsides," said Ranulfo Marquez, Veracruz state deputy secretary for civil protection.

Early Friday, Lorenzo was centered about 40 miles southwest of Tuxpan and was moving westward at 7 mph, the hurricane center said. It had top sustained winds near 40 mph.

Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Karen weakened in the open Atlantic Ocean, and was not threatening land. Karen's center was about 755 miles east of the Windward Islands at 5 a.m. EDT and moving west-northwest near 10 mph. Its maximum sustained winds had decreased to 45 mph.