

Beat: Travel

Tropical storm forms off Mexico; Pacific coast, heads for Baja Californ

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USPA News - Tropical Storm Lorena formed off Mexico's Pacific coast on Thursday afternoon, prompting storm watches for the southern portion of the Baja California peninsula where it is expected to make landfall on late Saturday morning, U.S. forecasters said. Forecasters at the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) had been following the weather system since early Monday when it emerged off the southwestern coast of Mexico as an area of cloudiness and thunderstorms in association with a low pressure system.

It became better organized on Wednesday and developed into a tropical depression by Thursday, before being upgraded to a tropical storm. As of 5 p.m. PDT (0000 GMT Friday), the center of Tropical Storm Lorena was located about 110 miles (180 kilometers) west-southwest of Cabo Corrientes, a cape on the Pacific coast of the Mexican state of Jalisco. It is moving toward the northwest at a speed near 12 miles (19 kilometers) per hour. Maximum sustained winds of Lorena have increased to near 40 miles (65 kilometers) per hour, with higher gusts, making it a weak tropical storm. Lorena is expected to strengthen slightly through Friday, allowing it to make landfall on the southern portion of Baja California as a tropical storm, but will then quickly weaken to a tropical depression before dissipating over the Gulf of California. "The initial structure of the cyclone would not seem to favor rapid intensification, but with light shear and warm waters, some strengthening seems probable during the next 36 hours or so," said NHC hurricane specialist Eric Blake. "Land interaction and cooler waters should cause Lorena to weaken after that time." No tropical storm warnings had been issued as of Thursday afternoon, but a tropical storm watch was in effect for Baja California Sur from Agua Blanca to Buenavista. "A tropical storm warning will likely be required for the southern part of Baja California Sur later tonight," Blake said. According to forecasters, the southwestern coast of Mexico and the southern portion of the Baja California peninsula can expect total rainfall accumulations of 3 to 5 inches (7.6 to 12.7 centimeters), with isolated maximum amounts of 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) possible. "These rains could produce life-threatening flash floods and mudslides," Blake warned. Lorena is the twelfth tropical cyclone of the 2013 Eastern Pacific hurricane season, which officially began on May 15. According to figures released in May, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center is expecting a below-normal season in the Eastern Pacific this year. The outlook called for 11 to 16 named storms, with 5 to 8 becoming hurricanes and 1 to 4 of them expected to become a major hurricane (category 3 or higher). An average Eastern Pacific hurricane season produces 15 to 16 named storms, with eight to nine becoming hurricanes and four becoming major hurricanes. The Eastern Pacific hurricane season runs from May 15 through November 30, with peak activity from July through September.

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