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HURRICANE FRANCES

READY OR NOT

Treasure Coast braces for full force of Frances



DEBORAH SILVER staff photographer

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With the center of dangerous Hurricane Frances predicted to make landfall on the Treasure Coast early Saturday morning, authorities are urging residents to finish their preparations immediately, take shelter and be safe.

Inside

More Hurricane Frances coverage.

TCPalm.com

Since forecasters still believe the track of the strong Category 4 storm could change, a hurricane warning was issued at 11 a.m. Thursday from Flagler Beach south to Florida City.

A warning means hurricane conditions are expected within 24 hours.

But even if the storm, packing 140-mph winds, veers slightly away from Martin, St. Lucie or Indian River counties, residents likely still will experience hurricane-force winds, up to 20 inches of rain and storm surges up to 14 feet above normal tide levels.

"This is likely a historic hurricane event for someone along the east coast," said Tony Cristaldi, a forecaster with the National Weather

y Lenoir of Stuart stands in a line of people waiting to get into a shelter at Pinewood Elementary School in Port Salerno on Thursday. Lenoir, who is seven months pregnant with her third child, said that she was in the hospital on Wednesday because of anxiety. "Between this heat and not knowing, it's kind of hard to relax," said Lenoir.

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FRANCES

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Service in Melbourne. "The effects are likely to be extreme."

As Frances bore down on the Bahamas islands Thursday, about 100,000 residents living on barrier islands, in low-lying areas and in mobile homes throughout the Treasure Coast were evacuating.

Meanwhile, other residents boarded up their homes and prepared for the worst. Shelters in Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River counties are open.

Although hurricane force winds are expected this morning, the brunt of the storm won't happen until early Saturday when the eye of Frances is expected to make landfall.

By 5 p.m. Thursday, Frances was located at 24.1 north latitude and 74.8 west longitude, about 375 miles from the southeast coast of Florida. It was moving at 10 mph, and was expected to slow slightly before

making landfall here.

"You don't have to be near the eye of the hurricane to feel the damaging effects of Frances," said Neil Stuart, a meteorologist with the National Hurricane Center in Miami. "Even if the winds increase or decrease a little, this is still an extremely dangerous hurricane."

Hurricane force winds extend up to 80 miles from the center, and tropical storm force winds — which will precede hurricane conditions — extend up to 185 miles from the center.

As long as telephone lines are operational, volunteers with the American Red Cross of Martin County will answer questions at (772) 287-2002.

Reconnaissance planes were still out in the storm Thursday, as forecasters continued to monitor the high-pressure ridge and how it affects the path of Frances.

"The current projects take it into the Treasure Coast," Stuart said. "Be safe."

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