Beat: News

Amanda becomes strongest May hurricane on record off Mexico;s Pacific co

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USPA News - Hurricane Amanda strengthened into a major category four hurricane off Mexico`s Pacific coast on early Sunday morning, making it the strongest May hurricane on record in the eastern Pacific basin though there is no threat to land, forecasters said. Forecasters at the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) have been following the weather system since last Monday when it emerged far off the southwestern coast of Mexico as an area of low pressure.

It quickly became better organized on Thursday and developed into a tropical storm by Friday before reaching hurricane strength on Saturday and reaching major category three status just hours later. Amanda, which is now the second earliest major hurricane on record in the eastern North Pacific basin, continued to strengthen on Sunday morning, reaching category four status on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale of intensity with maximum sustained winds near 155 miles (250 kilometers) per hour, just 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) per hour shy of a category five status. "Amanda is now the strongest May hurricane on record in the eastern Pacific basin during the satellite era," said NHC senior hurricane specialist Stacy Stewart. He said satellite imagery indicated that Amanda had likely peaked in intensity at around 1200 GMT and was unlikely to become a category five storm. As of 2 p.m. PDT (2100 GMT), the center of Hurricane Amanda was located about 740 miles (1,185 kilometers) south of the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula in Mexico. The system is expected to continue moving northward through early next week, keeping the powerful storm well off Mexico`s Pacific coast and posing no threat to any populated areas. By Sunday afternoon, maximum sustained winds of Amanda had decreased to near 150 miles (240 kilometers) per hour, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center. "The [central dense overcast] has decreased in size and become more ragged looking during the past few hours, and the small eye is becoming less distinct and cloud-filled in visible imagery," Stewart said. "Cold upwelling and occasional intrusions of dry mid-level air should slowly erode the inner-core convection over the next 24 hours or so," Stewart explained. "An eyewall replacement cycle is also possible, which would act to hasten the weakening process. By day two and beyond, the combination of cooler water, drier air, and increasing southerly vertical wind shear should induce more rapid weakening, and Amanda is forecast to degenerate into a non-convective remnant low by day 5." Amanda is the first tropical cyclone of the Eastern Pacific hurricane season, which officially began on May 15. According to figures released on Thursday, NOAA`s Climate Prediction Center is expecting an above-normal season in the Eastern Pacific basin this year. The outlook calls for 14 to 20 named storms, with 7 to 11 becoming hurricanes and 3 to 6 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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