

September 7, 2017 9:00 am

We know these updates are sounding like a broken record at this point, but it's still too early for a call on potential impacts from Irma in Isle of Wight (IOW). The National Hurricane Center's (NHC) 5-day forecast still does not reach as far north as Virginia. As noted before, there is considerable uncertainty with regard to Irma's path beyond the NHC day 5 forecast. **REMEMBER: *Small track changes can mean BIG impact changes (good and bad) by the time the storm reaches day 5.*** We've watched the models trend east, back to the west, and now back eastward over the past few runs and it's likely we will continue to see model track shifts, especially beyond the 5-day track forecast.

The NHC currently gives most of Virginia at least a 5-20% chance of seeing at least tropical storm force winds in over the next 5-days (exactly when and for how long are still to be determined). The chances of tropical force winds are greater nearer the NC/VA boarder and decrease as you move northward.

As we've been saying all week, **NOW IS THE TIME TO BE PREPARING FOR HURRICANE IMPACTS.** Hoping IOW avoids Irma impacts is not a plan. If you already have a plan, now is the time to review it and make sure you are prepared to put it into action. If you don't have a plan, now is the time to make one (go to www.ready.gov for more information). You should also be making sure that you have a hurricane supply kit (that includes food, water and other supplies) that could support you and your family for at least 3-5 days. Best case scenario, Irma doesn't impact us significantly and you are better prepared for the storms that may follow Irma. We recommend that you continue to plan for the worst and hope for the best. Worst case, you'll be better prepared for a potential visit from storms that could impact us after Irma is a memory.

Overnight Irma passed by Puerto Rico and as of 8am this morning, Irma was about 110 miles north of the Dominican Republic and was moving WNW at 17mph. Irma remains a very strong major CAT 5 hurricane and currently has sustained winds of 180mph. Irma should remain in a warm-water and a low shear environment for about the next 3 days, the NHC intensity forecast keeps Irma as at least a Cat 4 (130+mph) strength until landfall in/near Florida. The forecast does show a decrease in wind speeds in the 4-5 day timeframe due to the expected shear and land interaction, but Irma is still expected to be a hurricane (currently forecasting a CAT 2 – 110mph) when Irma makes landfall in the southeastern United States.

Irma is still expected to make a fairly sharp turn northward as she nears the FL peninsula. The timing of the turn is critical and one still filled with uncertainty. If she turns north later, there is a chance that she could track more up the western edge of FL or even into the Gulf of Mexico and then northward. If Irma turns earlier, she'll likely track more off the eastern coast of Florida and puts a North Carolina landfall more into play. If the turn north occurs as forecast nearer the tip of the FL peninsula landfall nearer the South Carolina/Georgia border is much more likely. The NHC is currently favoring the SC/GA landfall track. Once landfall occurs, if Irma continues inland as expected, her winds should begin to decrease significantly.

When looking at the National Hurricane Center (NHC) forecast track it is important not to focus on the track representing the center of the forecast cone. It's important to note that the NHC's average error in their forecast track increases as the forecast time period grows – the average track error 4 days out is about 175 miles and it's 225 miles at day 5. That said, Irma's actual track is likely located somewhere within the boundaries of the forecast cone of uncertainty, but is likely not going to track right down the center of the forecast cone especially in days 4 and 5. What this means for us is that a Wilmington landfall, while not as likely as a South Carolina landfall, is still a definite possibility. Should Irma's southeastern US landfall be closer to Wilmington, the impacts IOW could see would certainly be increased.

Note: you can find prior tropics updates and preparedness information on the County's Facebook page at Isle of Wight County Virginia and on the County's website at <http://www.co.isle-of-wight.va.us/emergency-services/current-event-news/>.

