

Coast Keeps Eye on Earl

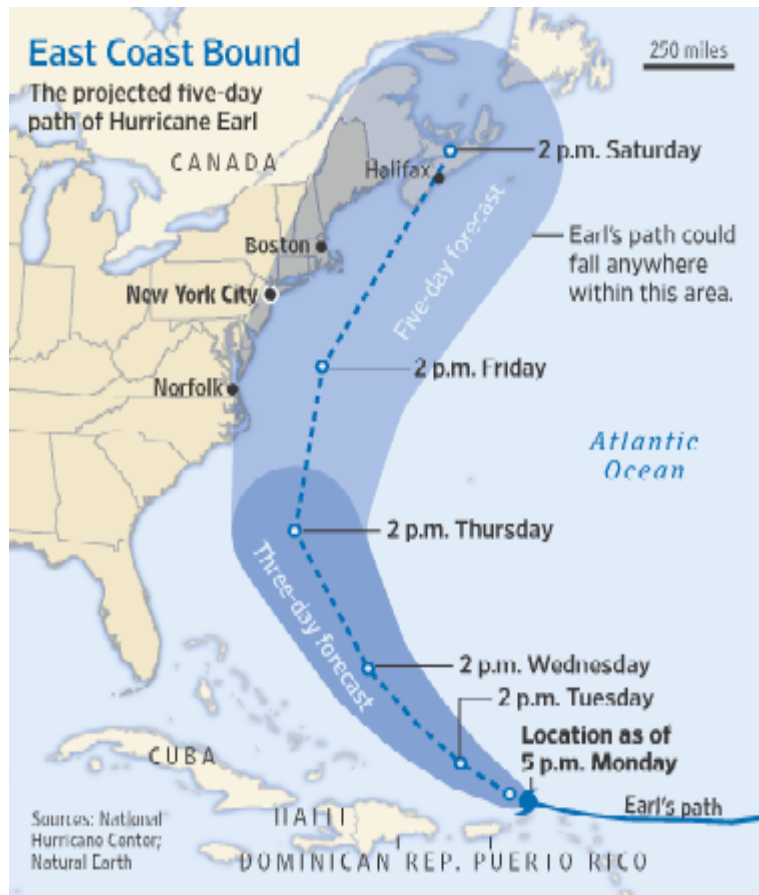
Storm Threatens Holiday Weekend

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By [CHRIS HERRING](#)

Wind, waves and rain from Hurricane Earl could threaten New York area beaches this Labor Day weekend, sending vacationers home early and prompting some officials to ready evacuation plans in case of storm-related flooding.



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Trackers project the strengthening storm with 135-mph winds, will steam northward, reaching North Carolina by midweek. The National Hurricane Center predicts a 20% to 30% probability that Hurricane Earl will bring winds with at least the intensity of a tropical storm to Greater New York by late Friday or early Saturday. The much-stronger eye of the storm is projected to stay off the East Coast.

The hurricane, which had intensified to a Category 4 storm, comes on the heels of Hurricane Danielle, which caused rough waters, riptides and red flags along a number of shorelines this past weekend in New York and New Jersey. But with plenty of sun and dry weather, beachgoers still flocked to the oceanfront.

Hurricane Earl will come "a lot closer to the coast than Danielle" and will almost certainly bring "high tides, rough surf and significant rip currents" along Long Island and the Jersey Shore, said Dennis Feltgen, a National Hurricane Center spokesman. "Anybody living on the East Coast of the United States should really be paying attention to this storm," he said.

A number of people already have. Joan Gelman, a New York City resident and television producer and writer, said she'd be cutting her time in the Hamptons short because of the weather.

"It's going to wreck Labor Day," said Ms. Gelman, who has property in Bridgehampton. Asked whether her friends were thinking of leaving early, too, she said, "Yes, I'm definitely hearing the rumblings."

Joe Gomulka, captain of the Seaside Park Beach lifeguards in New Jersey, said he's already assuming that he'll have to close much of the beach this weekend. "Honestly, I think the week is already over," he joked.

Preparedness experts are urging shoreline homeowners in New Jersey, Connecticut and Long Island to be ready for both the wind and the possibility of flooding from storm surges that can accompany hurricanes. Among their suggestions: Keep contact information for your insurance agent in a safe place alongside your policies and other vital records. Clear debris from gutters, remove objects such as deck chairs that could be thrown by high winds, trim dead branches from trees and anchor fuel tanks and other heavy objects that may float away.

Officials in New Jersey were also preparing for flooding. Frank McCall, director of the Cape May County, N.J., emergency management communication center, said if predictions for Hurricane Earl hold, his office would ask people living in the county's low-lying areas to evacuate for the first time since 1985.

"We don't sound the alarm too often, so people here know we're being serious if we ask them to move," he said.

—Erik Holm contributed to this article.

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