

# LaNiña Comes On, Bringing Near Record Storm Season

By Wayne P. Salladé, FPEM

Unlike 2009, which produced fewer than normal named storms (9) and didn't get going until mid-August, the 2010 hurricane season started in June and brought us 19 named tropical systems, tying it for third all-time in terms of activity with 1995 and 1887. The 12 hurricanes ties 1887 and 1969 for the second most ever during the six-month season. Despite the very busy season, only a weak Tropical Storm Bonnie, which crossed South Florida on July 23rd, brought any kind of threat. A Tropical Storm Warning put the region on alert, but some gusty winds and passing showers were the only impact. The remainder of the season amounted to a lot of watching and waiting, hoping that the storms missed friends and family in their path.

The season was highlighted by five major hurricanes (Cat. 3+), with Igor being the strongest, its winds reaching 155mph. Although never directly threatening the U.S., Hurricane Igor was a huge storm (550 miles wide) as it neared Bermuda and later became the largest Atlantic hurricane by gale diameter (920 mi.) on record. Dangerous rip currents and tides much above normal impacted the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. as Igor turned north and headed for the Canadian Maritimes.

It was Hurricane Earl in late August and early September that posed the greatest threat to the U.S. mainland. One of four Category 4 storms in 2010, Earl drew a bead on North Carolina's Outer Banks and for several days looked as though it might rake the Atlantic Coastline from the Carolinas to New England. The storm brushed Cape Hatteras on September 2nd and just missed New Jersey, Long Island and Cape Cod on its tour northeast.

Tropical Storm Matthew in late September was the deadliest storm, taking 126 lives in Central and South America. Category 3 Hurricane Karl (120 mph winds) in mid-September was the costliest, causing estimated \$5.6 billion damage on the Yucatan Peninsula (Mexico) and the nation of Belize.

The month of September saw eight named storms, tying it for the busiest month ever with 2002 and 2007. During one 36-day period in August and September there was at least one active tropical cyclone in the Atlantic Basin. Three separate times, there were three storms active at once. On September 15, Igor and Julia reached Category 4 strength simultaneously, the first time that had happened since 1926! When Karl became a hurricane the next day, there were three hurricanes on the map for the first time since 1998.

The bottom line is the U.S. and most notably Florida was extremely fortunate that the prevailing currents and the jet stream were aligned such that storms steered clear of the U.S. The Caribbean, mid-Atlantic and Southwest Gulf of Mexico took the brunt of the storm activity in 2010, but as far as disasters go, it was the Central Gulf that had the spotlight for much of the past year.

On the evening of April 20th, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf, about 41 miles southeast of Louisiana and later sank to the bottom. The resultant oil leak became the largest in U.S. history and dominated the headlines for months. The leaking well was not capped until July 15 and by then had released nearly 4.9 million barrels of oil into Gulf of Mexico waters.

During the nearly three months oil gushed unabated from the ruptured well, communities all along the Gulf Coast were forced to respond, fearing that beaches and pristine estuaries would be fouled and that the fishing and tourism industries would face catastrophic losses that could impact the region for years. Southwest Florida was no exception and local governments acted quickly to revisit oil spill contingency plans in concert with the U.S. Coast Guard and develop new policies and procedures to deal with anticipated impacts. Despite a 300-mile buffer between this area and the spill zone, residents, business owners and potential visitors, all took a "wait-and-see" approach as to what the ultimate outcome would bring.

Emergency Managers, Fire Departments, elected officials and environmental organizations have worked in concert to mitigate the fallout from this extraordinary event. Southwest Florida sent professionals to the directly impacted areas of Alabama, Mississippi and Northwest Florida to assist in the recovery effort. Numerous public outreach opportunities gave residents a chance to ask questions and get straight answers from people in the know and not simply rely on second-hand media reports often fraught with inaccuracies.

Despite a year absent of any major natural hazards, this region must remain vigilant as experts are predicting yet another much above normal season of hurricane activity in 2011 and the possibility of dangerous wildfire conditions as well. Spring and summer bring the ever-present threat of severe thunderstorms and tornados.

Emergency Managers continue to urge residents to develop a Family Action Plan. Visit the State's new website at [www.kidsetaplan.org](http://www.kidsetaplan.org) to see what families can do together in an effort to be better prepared when disasters loom. Purchase a Weather Alert Radio as part of your disaster supplies kit and make sure this guide stays with it. If you need help, call your local Emergency Management or Red Cross Office at the numbers listed in this book.

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### All Emergencies

Dial 911

### Cellular Phones

Crimestop \*99

Crimewatch \*11

Photos Courtesy of the USGS,  
Local Emergency Management Agencies  
& National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
Administration (NOAA).