



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY



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NEW ENGLAND HURRICANES OF NOTE

FRAMINGHAM, MA – Although the Hurricane Season in New England is defined as June 1st through November 30th, the vast majority of the 40 tropical systems that have impacted our region over the past century have struck during the months of August and September. Because Massachusetts is such a relatively small state, it is important to realize that these are not just ‘coastal events’, but, in fact, everyone in the Commonwealth can be severely impacted by a major storm.

“New England is in the unenviable position of receiving all three types of Hurricane Threats,” states Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce. “Depending upon the storm’s track and landfall location, we can experience coastal inundation from storm surge, widespread inland river flooding, and widespread wind damage.”

To best prepare ourselves for the future, it is important to revisit the past, and examine a dozen of the most notable New England Hurricanes and their catastrophic impact upon our region.

**The Great Colonial Hurricane of 1635
August 25, 1635**

This was the first historical record of an intense hurricane striking New England. The highest winds have been estimated at Category 3 or greater, with winds of 115-plus mph. The storm’s eye passed between Boston and Plymouth causing at least 46 casualties. A 20-foot tidal surge was reported in Boston, ruining farms throughout the area. Reports from Governor William Bradford describing the drowning of dozens of Native Americans, the toppling of thousands of trees and the flattening of houses suggest that this storm possessed even greater intensity than the storms of 1815 and 1938.

**The Great September Gale of 1815
September 23, 1815**

This storm was the first major hurricane to impact New England in 180 years. It initiated in the West Indies, growing to a Category 3 with winds of 135 mph. After crossing Long Island, New York, the storm came ashore at Saybrook, Connecticut, funneling an 11-foot storm surge up

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Narragansett Bay. There, it destroyed 500 houses, 35 ships and flooded Providence, Rhode Island. Impacting Central and Coastal Massachusetts, 'The Great Gale' destroyed the bridge over the Neponset River, connecting Dorchester and Milton, Massachusetts. At least 38 deaths have been attributed to this disaster.

The September Gale of 1869
September 8, 1869

A Category 3, this 'September Gale' was first observed in the Bahamas. It ultimately made landfall in Rhode Island just west of Buzzards Bay, dissipating in Northern Maine. This storm was very compact, but intense. It was reported to have been only 60 miles wide, but it caused extensive damage in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maine. Fortunately, its arrival coincided with low tide lessening the storm surge and resulting damage.

The Great New England Hurricane of 1938
September 21, 1938

This Category 5, which has also been dubbed "The Long Island Express", was first detected in the Tropical Atlantic. As it slowly moved northward, it suddenly accelerated to a forward motion of 60 to 70 mph, when it was 100 miles east of North Carolina. Without warning, it made landfall as a Category 3, during an astronomically high tide along Long Island, New York and the Connecticut coast. The Blue Hill Observatory, outside of Boston, measured sustained winds of 121 mph, with gusts of 183 mph. Storm surges of 10 to 12 feet inundated portions of the coast from Long Island to Southeastern Massachusetts, most notably in Narragansett Bay and Buzzards Bay. Heavy rains of 3" to 6" produced severe flooding, particularly in areas of Western Massachusetts and along the Connecticut River. Downtown Providence, Rhode Island was impacted by a 20-foot storm surge. Sections of the Towns of Falmouth and Truro on Cape Cod were under 8 feet of water. The widespread destruction resulting from this storm included 600 deaths and 1,700 injuries. Over \$400 million in damage occurred, including 9,000 homes and businesses lost and 15,000 damaged. Damage to the Southern New England fishing fleet was catastrophic, as over 6,000 vessels were either destroyed or severely damaged.

The Great Atlantic Hurricane of 1944
September 14-15, 1944

Sometimes compared to the Great Hurricane of 1938, this storm was first detected northeast of the Lesser Antilles. From there, it hugged the United States coast, crossing Long Island, New York, the Rhode Island Coast, emerged into Massachusetts Bay and impacted Maine. With 140 mph winds, this Category 4, produced hurricane force winds over a diameter of 600 miles causing over \$100 million damage. 70-foot high waves were also reported. Up to 11" of rain fell in areas of New England. 390 deaths, mostly at sea, were attributed to this hurricane. It wreaked havoc on World War II shipping, sinking a U.S. Navy destroyer and minesweeper, as well as two U.S. Coast Guard cutters.

Hurricane Dog
September 11-12, 1950

A strong Category 5, Hurricane Dog reached a peak intensity of 185 mph. First observed east of the Lesser Antilles on August 30th, this was a major hurricane that never actually made landfall, passing within 200 miles of Cape Cod. However, it was responsible for the deaths of at least a

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dozen fishermen off the New England coast. It also caused about \$3 million damage. To this day, it retains the record for the longest continuous duration for a Category 5 Atlantic Hurricane of 60 hours, from September 5th through September 8th. ‘Dog’ also fluctuated between Category 4 & 5 strength on four different occasions, which is also a record.

Hurricane Carol

August 31, 1954

This compact, but powerful Category 3 battered New England, killing 68. With 100 mph winds, gusting up to 135mph, ‘Carol’ caused over \$461 million in damage, destroying 4,000 homes, 3,500 cars, and over 3,000 boats. This was arguably the most destructive storm to hit Southern New England since 1938. It formed as a tropical storm near the Bahamas, making brief landfall along the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The storm passed over Long Island, New York, through Central New England into Canada, bringing a storm surge of 14.4 feet to Narragansett Bay and New Bedford Harbor. Over 6” of rain fell. Water depths reached 12 feet in downtown Providence, Rhode Island. Some consider ‘Carol’ the worst storm in the history of Cape Cod. All of Rhode Island, much of Eastern Connecticut, and much of Eastern Massachusetts lost power, with a 95% loss of telephone service. The name ‘Carol’ has been retired.

Hurricane Edna

September 11, 1954

‘Edna’ arrived right on the heels of Hurricane Carol. It formed off of Barbados, reaching Category 3 strength at the Outer Banks of North Carolina, with its highest winds of 120 mph. Before striking New England, its eye split into two different ones, up to 60 miles apart at times, moving over Cape Cod & the Islands where peak gusts were recorded at 120 mph. Its eastern track, which resulted in heavy rain and major inland flooding, adding 5” to 7” of rain to Carol’s previous 6”. The storm was responsible for 29 deaths and \$40 million damage. Ultimately, it made landfall near Eastport, Maine, becoming one of Maine’s worst-ever hurricanes. The name ‘Edna’ has been retired.

Hurricane Diane

August 17-19, 1955

Born in the tropical Atlantic, this storm reached Category 3 status, as it followed the path of Hurricane Connie of 5 days earlier. Maximum winds were recorded at 120 mph. Although it weakened to a Tropical Storm as it reached the Southern New England coast, ‘Diane’ dropped heavy rain of 10” to 20”, setting flood records throughout the region. The storm was blamed for between 185 and 200 deaths. The \$832 million damage qualified it as the most costly hurricane in U.S. history until Hurricane Betsy in 1965. The name ‘Diana’ has been retired.

Hurricane Donna

September 12, 1960

Hurricane Donna was a Category 5 Cape Verde-type hurricane that impacted most of the Caribbean Islands and every single state on the U.S. Eastern seaboard. It recorded 160 mph winds with gusts up to 200 mph. ‘Donna’ holds the record for retaining ‘major hurricane’ status of Category 3 or better in the Atlantic basin for the longest period of time. From September 2nd to September 11th it sustained winds of 115 mph as it roamed the Atlantic for 17 days. This storm is the only one on record to produce hurricane-force winds in Florida, the Mid-Atlantic

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States and New England. ‘Donna’ hit New England in Southeast Connecticut with sustained winds of 100 mph, gusting to 125-130 mph, cutting diagonally through the region to Maine. It produced pockets of 4” to 8” of rain as well as 5 to 10-foot storm surges. The storm ultimately killed 364, and caused over \$500 million in damage. The name ‘Donna’ has been retired.

Hurricane Gloria September 27, 1985

Hurricane Gloria was a powerful Category 4 Cape Verde-type storm that prowled the Atlantic for 13 days, with highest winds of 145 mph. Hugging the coastline, as it made its way north, ‘Gloria’ crossed Long Island, New York, making landfall at Milford, Connecticut. In spite of arriving during low tide, it did cause severe beach erosion along the New England coast, as well as the loss of many piers and coastal roads. There was a moderate storm surge of 6.8 feet in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The storm left over 2,000,000 people without power. It dropped up to 6” of rain in Massachusetts, causing many flooding issues in the region. Overall, casualties were relatively low with 8 deaths, but damage reached \$900 million. The name ‘Gloria’ has been retired.

Hurricane Bob August 19, 1991

Formed east of the Bahamas, Hurricane Bob made landfall in New England near New Bedford, Massachusetts with 115 mph winds, cutting a path across Southeastern Massachusetts towards the Gulf of Maine. Peak winds of 125 mph were recorded in the Towns of Brewster and Truro on Cape Cod. Over 60% of the residents of Southeastern Massachusetts and Southeastern Rhode Island lost power. There were 4 different reports of tornados as ‘Bob’ came ashore. Buzzards Bay saw a 10 to 15-foot storm surge. A number of south-facing beaches on the islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard lost 50 feet of beach to erosion. Up to 7” of rain was reported to have fallen throughout New England. ‘Bob’ was blamed for 18 storm-related deaths. The damage total for Southern New England was set at \$1 billion, with \$2.5 billion overall damage from the storm. The name ‘Bob’ has been retired.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Hurricane Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema.

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