

MANY KEYS RESIDENTS EVACUATE

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Written By Donna Rogers

Hurricane warnings were dropped Tuesday morning for the Upper Keys, but residents of the Lower Keys continued to brace for the winds as high as 100 mph a possibility.

Hurricane warnings from Craig Key at the Channel Five Bridge north were dropped as Hurricane Kate brushed the coast of Cuba at 20 mph heading west Tuesday morning.

The Lower Keys were still in danger from Feeder bands of Hurricane Kate, and gale force winds with occasional gusts to hurricane force were expected from about noon through the afternoon and early evening, according to Monroe County Civil Defense Director Bill Wagner.

Twelve shelters were open throughout the Keys Wagner said, but added that the shelters in the Upper Keys might be closed as of about 10:00AM. Tuesday with the threat to the Upper Keys lowering.

Two shelters were reported open in the Key West area Tuesday morning, the shelter in the Federal building on Simonton Street and the shelter at Glynn Archer School, 1302 White Street. About 450 people had been in to the 12 County shelters by Tuesday morning, Wagner said.

Many people had already left the Keys Monday night, he said. By Tuesday morning it was estimated that 1,300 vehicles had left the Key West area and about 10,000 people had evacuated the Keys, Wagner said.

Traffic was reported as moving from 15-20 mph on U S Highway 1 as people evacuated the Keys Monday night and Tuesday morning, but there had been no real traffic problems, and traffic was moving in a continuous flow, Wagner said. For those leaving Key West, it was taking about six hours for the journey, Wagner said.

Although Monroe County Mayor Wilhelmina Harvey order the evacuation of all mobile homes and trailers, many residents were reported to be remaining in trailer parks in Key West and Stock Island, Tuesday morning, although Wagner said it was not considered safe to remain in the trailers.

“It’s their life at stake, and we can’t guarantee their safety, Wagner said.

At Civil Defense Headquarters in Key West, the center was being manned Monday night and Tuesday morning by a staff of about 15, Wagner said. Members of the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office, the Public Works Department, the Social Service

groups, Southern Bell, The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority and City Electric were on hand at the center.

Wagner said that if there was a problem with water lines, the official from Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority would make a recommendation on whether residents should drink the water or not.

To keep abreast of any of the latest recommendations during the storm, Wagner advised that residents stay tuned to their local radio station.

The Key West Harbor was closed to ships over 100 gross tons, and no traffic over that weight would be allowed in or out during the storm, according to officials of the U S Coast Guard.

Businesses downtown were still boarding up windows and shoring up doorways with sand bags in preparation of the coming of the expected high winds and tides, Tuesday morning.

Tides were expected to reach a peak in the late afternoon, and could be up to seven feet higher than normal if the eye of the hurricane passed through near Key West, official said. If the storm continued on its course, tides would be probably in the two to four feet range. The worst tides could be expected during high tide in the late afternoon, when winds would also be at their strongest, officials at the Civil Defense Headquarters said. Tides would be at their highest between 3:30PM and 4:30PM in Key West on the Atlantic side and from 5:30PM on the Gulf side in Key West, 7:30PM in Big Pine Key and 9:00PM in Marathon, officials said.

The U S Postal Service was still open Tuesday morning and would remain open until further notice, according to post office officials.

Some banks were open to local businesses, but in general the banks checked were not opening for normal customer activity, Tuesday.

Fausto's Food Place on Fleming Street was "extremely busy" Monday night and Tuesday morning, and had almost sold out of many emergency items, according to store management. The food store opened earlier than normal Tuesday morning as people were waiting outside the doors to buy last minute supplies when employees arrived, management said.

"We are completely sold out of canned tuna and potted meat," said the day manager who added that more than 600 jugs of bottled water had been sold. People were still streaming into the store to buy candles, batteries, and other emergency items although there was "little left," the manager said.

Although many were apparently stocking up on emergency supplies, other visited local bars, some of which remained open Tuesday morning, providing a different type of

fortification for the coming storm. Hurricane parties were common as Key Westers, some with a traditional hardy attitude towards the possible disaster and a tendency to turn anything into a party, toasted the storm with the concoction of a new drink at one bar aptly titled “Kiss Me Kate.”