

EIGHT NAMED STORMS ROCKED US MAINLAND IN 1985

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The U.S. mainland is under siege.

While the Atlantic hurricane season has produced about an average number of named storms, eight of 11 have made a direct hit on the continental United States. That ties a record: Only twice before in this century – in 1909 and 1916 – have that many storms battered the nation.

“This season is on the average for the number of storms,” said Mark Zimmer, a forecaster with the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables. “The reason it seems that it’s a lot, and it certainly seems that way to us, is that in 1982 and 1983 we had way below the normal number. Then last year we had a couple above normal, but most of them did not affect the mainland. This year we had a normal number, but an abnormal number affected people.”

And there remains another week in the official hurricane season, which runs from June 1 through Nov. 30. The average for a season is 10 named storms, six of them hurricanes.

This season’s 11 storms, seven of them hurricanes, already have caused more than \$4 billion in damage and have left 25 people dead, according to hurricane-center estimates. Another 10 deaths were reported in Cuba.

All but three of the 11 storms have reached the continental United States, with four of them striking the Gulf Coast borders of Florida, Mississippi or Louisiana. Three of those four have hit Louisiana. And five of the 11 were in the Gulf of Mexico at one time or another.

The only storms to miss the mainland this year were Ana, Claudette and Fabian. Of these, only Claudette was a hurricane.

So many storms have hit the mainland this year because of changes in the “rivers of air” that steer storm systems. The general circulation pattern of atmospheric conditions normally shifts within a long-range period. Air currents meander through the northern and southern part of the country, following the same general longitudes the past three or four years.

Only this year, they changed course a little bit and have pushed storms and hurricanes into the coast. Plus, conditions favored storm formation this year. In the past El Nino,

the warming of the Pacific Ocean that affects jet stream has inhibited hurricane formation. But there was no evidence of El Nino this year.

The 1985 hurricane season began inauspiciously with Ana, the first named storm July 16. The storm died in the North Atlantic never reaching land. Anna was followed by Bob, the first hurricane, which threatened the Carolina coasts July 24 after crossing from Florida's west to east coast and moving north. Bob caused \$13 million in damage to the Southeast.

Claudette, the second hurricane August 11, brushed Bermuda but otherwise was no threat to land. But Danny, the third hurricane, slammed into the coast of Cameron, La, on August 15, causing \$50 million in damage and one death.

The season became more deadly with Elena, the fourth hurricane out of five storms. Elena, which grew to a hurricane Aug. 29, made a loop in the Gulf of Mexico that threw emergency planners for a loop. It was a tenuous Labor Day weekend, as Elena forced the largest evacuation in Florida's history. Still, Elena did not hit land until reaching Mississippi September 4. All told, Elena caused \$1.5 billion in damage and three deaths.

It was a difficult act to follow. Uneventful Fabian never reached hurricane status or land and died in the North Atlantic.

But Gloria was different. This was one of the strongest storms of the last century, with winds 155 mph at one point, the highest-category hurricane on a scale of intensity.

Gloria hugged the Eastern seaboard for two days Sept. 25, making landfall at Fire Island, Long Island, on September 23. Isabel, a tropical storm, came ashore two weeks later at St Augustine. By then its 65 mph winds had weakened to 45 mph.

Juan hit Louisiana with the second blow of a one-two punch October 29, rampaging into lowland areas, driving flood waters eastward into Mississippi and overturning another offshore drilling rig with three men trapped underwater. Juan also dumped heavy rains in the Carolinas and Virginia. In its wake Juan left \$1.5 billion in damage.