

Green | Weather & Science

More Intense Atlantic Hurricanes Coming as Saharan Dust Eases

Debby slammed into Florida on Monday, the second hurricane to strike the US this year.



Visitors look out a hotel window as Hurricane Debby makes landfall in Perry, Florida on Aug. 5. *Photographer: Christian Monterrosa/Bloomberg*

By [Rafaela Jinich](#)

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Hurricane Debby slammed into Florida on Monday, with ocean heat fueling powerful winds and rains. Now, another atmospheric force is setting the stage for even more intense tropical activity.

The Saharan dust plume that blanketed the Atlantic Ocean this summer is dissipating. That haze had been protecting the waters below from further solar radiation – and was delivering dry air that can help tame storms. With the dust now clearing, meteorologists are warning of more potent tropical cyclones in the upcoming months.

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“The Saharan dust has acted like a lid on storm formation, but with its influence waning, we expect conditions to become more favorable for storm development,” said Jeff Masters, a meteorologist for Yale Climate Connections. “August and September are typically the peak months for hurricanes, and this year, with record-warm ocean temperatures, we could see an especially active season.”

The dust clouds typically limit storm formation each year in June and July. This summer, dust levels have been exceptionally high, reaching as far as South Texas.

But even with that counteractive force, Debby is already the second hurricane to make landfall in the US this year. It followed Beryl, which struck eastern Texas last month and caused a massive power outage. The Atlantic basin typically doesn't produce its second system with winds reaching at least Category 1 levels until August 26.

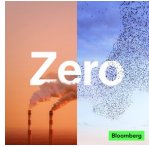
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Put simply: Months of record warm water across the Atlantic is fueling storms, and an early start to the season portends future disasters, especially as the Saharan dust clears.

In August and September, tropical systems typically form off the coast of Africa from atmospheric disturbances that move off of the continent. These waves head westward across the Atlantic, gaining strength over warm ocean waters and moist air. As they intensify, they can develop into hurricanes,

posing threats of heavy rain, strong winds and flooding to North and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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– *With assistance from Brian K Sullivan*

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