SAN JUAN, P.R. — Hurricane Maria made landfall on Puerto Rico as a powerful Category 4 storm early Wednesday, cutting electricity and phone lines, sending thousands of people into shelters and raising the prospect of deadly floods. The storm was bringing new misery to a region that has seen two other powerful hurricanes, Irma and Jose, in recent weeks.

As of 9 a.m., the eye of the storm was about 15 miles west-southwest of San Juan, having hit Yabucoa in the southeast shortly after 6 a.m. It had crossed the United States Virgin Islands as a Category 5 storm, then weakened slightly but remained “extremely dangerous,” with heavy rain and winds of up to 155 miles an hour.

As the hurricane moved in, residents across the island were awakened by the clamor of strengthening wind gusts.
“For Irma, we were very prepared,” Gov. Ricardo Rosselló said on CNN on Wednesday morning. “Unfortunately, of course, now we’re feeling a second storm in two weeks, and this one much more devastating than the first one. Who knows what the damage will be?”

Flooding and mudslides are major concerns, he warned, and the rain that follows the brunt of the storm could be just as dangerous as the winds.

**Here’s the latest:**

- The National Weather Service warned that “extremely dangerous floods are imminent along the Río de la Plata,” the island’s longest river.

- Gov. Rosselló said that 61 percent of the island’s electricity customers had lost power and that he expected the island to lose power entirely.

- He said that 11,000 people were reported to have gone to shelters, but that the real number was most likely higher.

- Hartley Henry, an adviser to Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit of Dominica, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that there had been seven confirmed deaths from Hurricane Maria on that island. Two people were also killed on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, officials said.

- Sign up for the Morning Briefing for hurricane news and a daily look at what you need to know to begin your day. Follow the storm’s path with our maps.

**Federal officials say they are prepared to help**

On CNN, Brock Long, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said that the agency was well positioned to help in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

Mr. Long confirmed that both areas had fragile power systems. “It’s going to be a very frustrating event to get the power back on,” he said.
Puerto Ricans wake up to strong winds

Residents of Puerto Rico braced for a more direct hit than from Irma, which killed three people there and knocked out power to many.

As the storm moved in, Jerika Llano, 27, took refuge with three family members in her concrete home in Bayamón, a town near the island’s capital. She said the wind was “blowing hard and screaming.”

“Almost all the trees have fallen, and I can see aluminum roofs flying,” she said. “The doors and gates vibrate because of the power of the gusts.”

In the town of Cataño in northern Puerto Rico, several houses lost their zinc roofs and the roof of a church was ripped apart, Felix Delgado Montalvo, the town’s mayor, said on a local radio station.

“My message now is not to leave your houses until the situation is over,” he told listeners.

‘There was howling in every part of this house,’ said a St. Croix resident

Residents of the Virgin Islands, whose homes were damaged by Irma two weeks ago, had been urged to find new shelters to ride out Maria.

The storm began pounding the Virgin Islands on Tuesday evening, and a flash-flood alert was sent to residents’ cellphones at 10:05 p.m., Gov. Kenneth E. Mapp of the United States Virgin Islands said. He had warned that hurricane-strength winds were likely to batter the islands until Wednesday morning.

The core of the storm passed south of the Virgin Islands, with the outer eyewall lashing St. Croix.

“There was howling in every part of this house,” said Ernice Gilbert, a journalist who lives on the east side of the island. “In my area, the winds were ferocious. But the bulk of the winds were expected to hit strongest in the southwest.”
At one point, he said, the rafters of his house began “cracking,” and part of his wall had cracked. The strong winds forced him to barricade his doors with couches, Mr. Gilbert said.

“That was the scariest portion of the ordeal for me,” he said by telephone.

Maria had battered the island nation of Dominica a day earlier. Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit described the damage as “mind-boggling” and wrote on Facebook that he had to be rescued after winds ripped the roof off his official residence. But little information has emerged since then, with the storm having taken out phone and power lines on Dominica.

Luis Ferré-Sadurni reported from San Juan, and Austin Ramzy from Hong Kong. Jonah Engel Bromwich contributed reporting from New York.
Hurricane Maria pounds Puerto Rico after killing 7 people in Dominica

Holly Yan, Euan McKirdy and Jaide Timm-Garcia, CNN
7-8 minutes

Story highlights

- Maria has killed at least 7 people on the island of Dominica, an official said

- "This is total devastation. Puerto Rico ... will not be the same," a spokesman said

San Juan, Puerto Rico (CNN) Hurricane Maria pummeled Puerto Rico on Wednesday morning, ripping trees out of the ground and hammering two-thirds of the island with hurricane-force winds.

"This is total devastation," said Carlos Mercader, a spokesman for Puerto Rico's governor. "Puerto Rico, in terms of the infrastructure, will not be the same. ... This is something of historic proportions."

Maria has killed seven people on the Caribbean island nation of Dominica, said Gaston Browne, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda. Browne said he had been communicating with the Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit, whose own house
was shredded by the storm.

Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico on Wednesday near the city of Yabucoa with winds of 155 mph, the National Hurricane Center said. By 10 a.m., those winds had weakened to 145 mph, but Maria was still a Category 4 hurricane capable of ripping roofs off houses.

The storm was so fierce, it broke two National Weather Service radars on the island.

Calls for rescue immediately started pouring in -- but to no avail.

"First responders cannot go out there," Mercader said, echoing the governor's earlier warning that emergency crews wouldn't go outside in winds stronger than 50 mph.

Maria was expected to cause widespread power outages across Puerto Rico. Shortly after landfall, the storm had wiped out power in the east coast city of Fajardo.

Thousands of Puerto Ricans heeded calls to go to emergency shelters. "As of 2:30 a.m. we count 10,059 refugees and 189 pets (in shelters)," the island's governor, Ricardo Rosselló, tweeted.

Maria became the first hurricane of Category 4 strength or higher in nearly 80 years to hit the US territory, home to 3.3 million people.

As residents hunkered down in homes and shelters ahead of the direct impact, others in the most vulnerable, low-lying, flood-prone areas were evacuated.

The Puerto Rico Convention Center in San Juan -- which was
still housing Hurricane Irma evacuees from other Caribbean islands -- prepared to accept thousands more residents.

**Potentially 'strongest ever' storm**

The storm was likely to be a record-breaking event, CNN meteorologist Derek Van Dam said.

"This could potentially be the strongest hurricane to ever reach the shores of Puerto Rico," he said from San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital.

"A lot of people remember or have heard of the storms that hit in 1928 and 1930. Well, guess what? This could pale those in comparison. ... It will go down in the record books."

Storm surges of 6 to 9 feet were expected.

"Hurricane Maria is really scraping the upper echelon of what's possible with hurricanes, (with) 175 mph sustained winds right around the center of the storm," Van Dam said Tuesday.

The island's mountainous terrain was likely to act like a barrier and squeeze a lot of moisture out of Maria, he said, producing as much as 2 feet of rain in some places. That could lead to flash flooding, which Rosselló stressed often is the top cause of death following a storm like this.
Local politicians warned of the storm's potential impact but also heralded the islanders' spirit.

"We are going to be hit hard," San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz told CNN. "But we are blessed that we have what it takes to move and push on. We will make it, I bet you. I have no doubt, we're going to make it."

**Stocking up**

Residents in San Juan made sure to stock up ahead of the hurricane's arrival. A sign on one store shelf asked customers on Tuesday to limit themselves to two cases of water, but the supply had already run out by the time a CNN team arrived. The store still had food and other supplies.

At a gas station across the street, the attendant said the station ran out of regular gas Tuesday morning, then ran out of premium.

Shoppers hunting for essentials, such as ice, waited for hours to buy the commodity, which would be used to keep perishables cool during a power outage.

The government also had been "organizing" ahead of the storm, Rosselló told CNN's Anderson Cooper.
"We can get people out of harm's way -- flooding regions -- and make their way to safe shelters," he said. "What we're doing is making sure people can pass through, they can weather the storm."

"It's not going to be comfortable, but they're going to be safe. This is our key objective," he said. "We understand infrastructure is going to be devastated. We're going to have to rebuild. ... Lives are not replaceable, but infrastructure is."

**Tourists stranded**

Some tourists found themselves stranded on the island as flights, already overbooked and increasingly expensive, became unavailable.

Heather Farrell was on her honeymoon with her husband, Luke, after their September 9 wedding. The couple had tried to cut the trip short when it became apparent they were in Maria's firing line, she said.

"We did try to get off, as early as Saturday, but all flights were either booked or canceled. We actually are on the ocean -- our room faces the ocean. It's pretty windy, but there is no rain. We'll stay inside for now," she said.

Hotel staff had asked all guests to head downstairs early Wednesday morning to take shelter in a safe room, Farrell said.

"I would rather be home than here, but I guess we're making the best of it," she said.

Nick Bailey, Brandon Edwards and John Michael Berndt -- three
friends from northern California -- chose this week to vacation on the island. They were aware of Maria, which was only a tropical depression when they left California.

"Our hostel is taking good care of us," Berndt said, adding that staff there had boarded all the windows and created a concrete hurricane barrier. "We tried to take flights out last minute but that didn't work so we're going to ride through the storm."

"This is a good area, apparently," Bailey said. "It's close to hospitals and emergency centers."

The men also were moved to rooms deeper inside the hostel -- without any windows.

**Prime Minister's house destroyed**

As Maria pushed through the Caribbean toward Puerto Rico, two people were missing after a boat sank off the coast of La Désirade, a small island near the mainland of Guadeloupe. About 80,000 people, or 40% of households on the island, were left without power, the government said.
The storm also caused "widespread devastation" in Dominica, the country's Prime Minister said Tuesday. Maria ripped off the roof of his own house and left much of the island -- population 73,000 -- in ruins.

In just 30 hours, Maria's intensity exploded from 65 mph on Sunday to 160 mph by Monday night, the National Hurricane Center said.

CNN's Brandon Miller, Nick Paton Walsh, Judson Jones and Leyla Santiago contributed to this report.
Hurricane Maria Blasts Puerto Rico With Damaging Winds, Major Flooding; Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos Danger Ahead

By the weather.com Digital Meteorologists
9-12 minutes

Maria Rips Roofs Off Buildings in San Juan

High winds rip away roofs in San Juan as Hurricane Maria sweeps through.

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Caption Data Unavailable

Now Playing:

Maria Rips Roofs Off Buildings in San Juan

High winds rip away roofs in San Juan as Hurricane Maria sweeps through.

Story Highlights
Maria is tearing through Puerto Rico with flooding rain, damaging winds, and storm surge flooding.

Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a Category 4 hurricane
after pummeling the Virgin Islands.

This was the most intense hurricane landfall in Puerto Rico since before the Great Depression.

Maria may then pass near the Dominican Republic Thursday, then the Turks and Caicos Friday.

Hurricane warnings have now been issued for the Turks and Caicos and the southeastern Bahamas.

It remains too early to determine if Maria will ever threaten the U.S. East Coast next week.

Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, is about to emerge off the northwest coast of Puerto Rico after becoming the island’s strongest hurricane landfall since before the Great Depression, continuing to lash the island and the nearby Virgin Islands with destructive winds, flooding rain and storm surge.

(FULL MARIA COVERAGE: Hurricane Central)

Happening Now

The eyewall of Maria, while disrupted by the mountainous terrain, continues to carve through Puerto Rico, passing just south and west of San Juan, lashing the capital with eyewall winds.

(INTERACTIVE LOOP: Track Maria Now)
Current Storm Status

The highest cloud tops, corresponding to the most vigorous convection, are shown in the brightest red colors. Clustering, deep convection around the center is a sign of a healthy tropical cyclone.

Winds are still gusting over 100 mph in parts of central and northern Puerto Rico, and gusts over 40 mph are still occurring in parts of the Virgin Islands.

Here are a sampling of peak wind gusts seen so far in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as of Wednesday morning. Thanks to NOAA meteorologist Alex Lamers for assistance compiling these peak gusts.

- Western St. Croix, Virgin Islands: 137 mph (sustained winds of 106 mph)
- Isla Culebrita, Puerto Rico: 137 mph
- Gurabo, Puerto Rico: 120 mph (WeatherFlow station)
• Camp Santiago, Puerto Rico: 118 mph
• El Negro, Puerto Rico: 116 mph
• Yabucoa, Puerto Rico: 116 mph (WeatherFlow station)
• Arecibo, Puerto Rico: 111 mph
• San Juan, Puerto Rico: 110 mph (WeatherFlow station)
• Fajardo, Puerto Rico: 100 mph
• San Juan (Luis Muñoz Marin Int'l Airport), Puerto Rico: 95 mph
• St. Thomas, Virgin Islands: 86 mph

A storm surge of over 5 feet was recorded by a NOAA tide gauge at Yabucoa Harbor, Puerto Rico, and intense south-southeast winds continue to pile water into the harbor on the east side of Maria's circulation.

Through Wednesday morning, here are some other peak storm surge values, above the average high tide level:

• San Juan Bay, Puerto Rico: About 2.4 feet
• Fajardo, Puerto Rico: About 2.3 feet
• Arecibo, Puerto Rico: About 2.2 feet
• Christiansted Harbor, St. Croix, Virgin Islands: About 2 feet
• Culebra, Puerto Rico: About 1.7 feet
• St. John (Lameshur Bay), Virgin Islands: About 1.5 feet

According to NWS-San Juan, rain rates approached 5 to 7 inches per hour Wednesday morning.

This torrential rain prompted flash flood warnings in much of
Puerto Rico and parts of the Virgin Islands.

Flash flood emergencies were issued for the Rio de la Plata basin. River levels had risen 20 feet since midnight near the town of Comerio.

Over a dozen river gauges reported levels above flood stage. The Rio Grande de Manati near Ciales shattered its previous record and the Rio Gurabo at Gurabo was rapidly nearing its record crest set in September 1960.

(MORE: NWS Current P.R. River Flood Status)

The eye of Maria came ashore near the town of Yabucoa, Puerto Rico, around 6:15 a.m. AST Wednesday as a Category 4 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 155 mph.

Maria was the strongest Puerto Rico landfall since the Category 5 September 1928 San Felipe/Lake Okeechobee hurricane.

Prior to both Irma and Maria, only four other Category 4 hurricanes had tracked within 75 miles of central Puerto Rico in historical records dating to the late 19th century. Hurricane Hugo in 1989 was the last to do so prior to 2017, though it had weakened to a Category 3 hurricane as it clipped the northeast tip of Puerto Rico, according to the NOAA best tracks database.

Current Watches/Warnings

Hurricane warnings have now been issued for the Turks and Caicos Islands and southeast Bahamas. Hurricane warnings mean hurricane conditions are expected within 36 hours.
Hurricane warnings remain in effect for the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Culebra, Vieques and in the Dominican Republic from Cabo Engano to Puerto Plata.

A tropical storm warning is in effect from west of Puerto Plata to the northern border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti and from west of Cabo Engano to Punta Palenque in the Dominican Republic.

Hurricane watches also are in effect in the Dominican Republic from Isla Saona to Cabo Engano.

Watches and Warnings

A watch means hurricane or tropical storm conditions are possible within 48 hours. A warning means those conditions are expected within 36 hours.

**Forecast: Caribbean to Bahamas**

Maria's core will continue to carve across Puerto Rico with destructive winds, storm surge flooding at the coast, and
flooding rain Wednesday before pulling away Wednesday evening.

Conditions in the Virgin Islands will slowly improve Wednesday, though some bands of heavy rain and at least tropical storm-force winds may persist for a time.

Projected Path

The red-shaded area denotes the potential path of the center of the tropical cyclone. Note that impacts (particularly heavy rain, high surf, coastal flooding) with any tropical cyclone may spread beyond its forecast path.

Portions of the Dominican Republic, particularly near the north coast, may see hurricane-force winds develop as soon as Wednesday evening continuing into at least Thursday morning. There is still some uncertainty, as any slight jog of the eyewall north could keep the most intense winds off the coast of the Dominican Republic.

In the southeast Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, hurricane
conditions are expected to arrive by late Thursday, but conditions will already begin to deteriorate, there, by Thursday morning.

A life-threatening storm surge raising water levels up to 6 to 9 feet above ground is possible in Puerto Rico.

In the hurricane warning area of the Dominican Republic, water levels may rise by as much as 4 to 6 feet above normal tide levels, with a storm surge of 1 to 3 feet possible elsewhere along the northern coasts of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Water levels up to 10 to 15 feet above normal tide levels are expected near and north of the center of Maria in the southeast Bahamas, as well as the Turks and Caicos.

Puerto Rico may see 12 to 18 inches of rain, with locally up to 25 inches in some areas, through Friday.

The Virgin Islands may receive an additional 5 to 10 inches of rain, with locally up to 15 inches.

The northern and eastern Dominican Republic, as well as the Turks and Caicos and southeast Bahamas are forecast to pick up 8 to 16 inches of rain, with isolated 20-inch amounts.

In northern Haiti, rainfall of 2 to 4 inches is expected.

These rainfall totals have the potential to produce widespread, life-threatening, potentially catastrophic flooding and mudslides.
Additional Rainfall Forecast

Will Maria Threaten the U.S. East Coast?

It is still too soon to determine at this time whether Maria will directly impact the East Coast of the U.S. next week.

The potential involves a complicated upper-level pattern including a weakening Jose, a building upper-level high pressure system, then an arriving southward plunge of the jet stream into the East.

(MORE: How Jose Could Affect Maria's Long-Term Steering)

For now, all residents along the East Coast should monitor the progress of Maria.

Storm Recap

Maria rapidly intensified from a Category 1 to Category 5 hurricane Monday in almost as little time as the infamous 2005 Hurricane Wilma did, thanks to a combination of low wind shear,
a moist atmosphere and warm ocean temperatures.

Maria then made landfall on the island of Dominica at 9:15 p.m. EDT Monday evening as a Category 5 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 160 mph, the first Category 5 landfall on the island in NOAA's historical record.

A report from a U.S. Air Force Reserve Hurricane Hunter mission Tuesday evening confirmed Maria had strengthened even more as maximum sustained winds increased to 175 mph and central pressure dropped to 909 mb, a lower pressure than Irma had at any time.

This is the lowest pressure for any Atlantic hurricane since Hurricane Dean's 905-mb minimum central pressure in August 2007. It is also the 10th-most-intense hurricane in Atlantic Basin history, based on minimum central pressure.

(MORE: 2017 Rivaling Other Historically Active Hurricane Seasons)

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