

Beat: Travel

Hurricane Paul prompts tropical storm watch for Baja California

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USPA News - Hurricane Paul formed Monday morning off the Pacific coast of Mexico, prompting a tropical storm watch for a portion of Baja California, forecasters said. Direct landfall is not expected, but the storm could affect some coastal areas in the region this week.

As of 5 a.m. PDT (1200 GMT), the center of Paul was located about 530 miles (850 kilometers) southwest of the southern tip of Baja California in Mexico. The hurricane is moving toward the north at a speed near 9 miles (15 kilometers) per hour, bringing the storm closer to land. Maximum sustained winds of Paul are near 80 miles (130 kilometers) per hour, with higher gusts, making it a category one hurricane on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale of intensity. The hurricane is likely to strengthen through Tuesday, but forecasters do not expect Paul to become a category two hurricane. "Additional strengthening is forecast during the next 12 to 24 hours as the shear is expected to remain light while the hurricane is over 26C (78.8F) to 28C (82.4F) waters," said Stacy Stewart, a senior hurricane specialist at the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC). "South-southwesterly shear is anticipated to increase significantly beginning tonight, and that combined with stable air and cooler water should cause Paul to lose strength." Stewart said Paul is currently forecast to remain well off Baja California, but cautioned the path could still change. "The eastward shift in the track forecast requires the issuance of a tropical storm watch for a portion of the west coast of Baja California," he said. "Users are reminded not to focus on the exact forecast track as typical NHC forecast errors are about 80 nautical miles (150 kilometers) at 48 hours." A tropical storm watch, which means tropical storm conditions are possible by late Tuesday, is in effect from Santa Fe to Puerto San Andresito. Additionally, swells generated by the hurricane are expected to begin affecting the south and central coasts of Baja California on Monday evening. Hurricane Paul is the sixteenth tropical cyclone of the 2012 Eastern Pacific hurricane season, which officially began on May 15. According to figures released in late May, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center is expecting a near-normal hurricane season in the Eastern Pacific this year. The outlook called for 12 to 18 named storms, with five to nine becoming hurricanes and two to five of them expected to become a major hurricane (category 3 or higher). An average Eastern Pacific hurricane season produces 15 to 16 named storms, with eight to nine becoming hurricanes and four becoming major hurricanes. The Eastern Pacific hurricane season runs from May 15 through November 30, with peak activity from July through September.

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