

Hurricane of doom: Skull-shaped Matthew kills 11 in the Caribbean and bears down on the East Coast as millions evacuate or batten down the hatches before devastating 'direct hit'

Deadly Hurricane Matthew, which has already killed 11 people in the Caribbean, has sparked evacuations across South Carolina and along Florida's barrier islands

Storm battered Haiti, Dominican Republic and southern Cuba yesterday before moving north today where it struck northern Cuba and the Bahamas

Eerie satellite images of Matthew over Haiti show the storm forming a grinning skull with glowing red eye

Forecasters warn the storm winds and heavy rain could hit Florida by Thursday and move up the East Coast

Florida Gov. Rick Scott declared a state of emergency for the state as he warned that Matthew could be as big as 1992's Hurricane Andrew

Hurricane wind speeds dropped overnight to 115mph making it a Category 3. At its height it was Category 5

A Hurricane Watch and a Tropical Storm Watch is now in effect for many parts of the southern state

Anxious Florida residents have been stocking up to prepare for the storm buying supplies and gas

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has issued an evacuation order for two counties; Charleston and Beaufort

Matthew's high winds and rain fall caused landslides, flooding, and the destruction of homes and businesses across Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba who were starting rebuilding efforts today

By HANNAH PARRY and REGINA F. GRAHAM FOR DAILYMAIL.COM and ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Evacuations have begun across Florida and South Carolina as the deadly, skull-shaped Hurricane Matthew bears down on the East Coast.

People have been flocking to hardware stores, grocery aisles and gas stations in anticipation of the deadly storm which is expected to make a devastating direct hit on the Sunshine State by Friday.

'I cannot emphasize enough that everyone in our state must prepare now for a direct hit,' said Florida Gov. Rick Scott who has declared a state emergency.

'That means people have less than 24 hours to prepare, evacuate and shelter. Having a plan in place could mean the difference between life and death.'

At least 11 people in the Caribbean have already died due to the storm including four in the Dominican Republic, and five in Haiti which were both pummeled by the hurricane yesterday. One person died in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and one in Colombia earlier this week.

Today the hurricane moved north, battering parts of Cuba and the Bahamas with 120mph winds.

The 'skull of Matthew' first appeared in satellite images of the storm during a weather forecast yesterday - to the shock of many viewers.

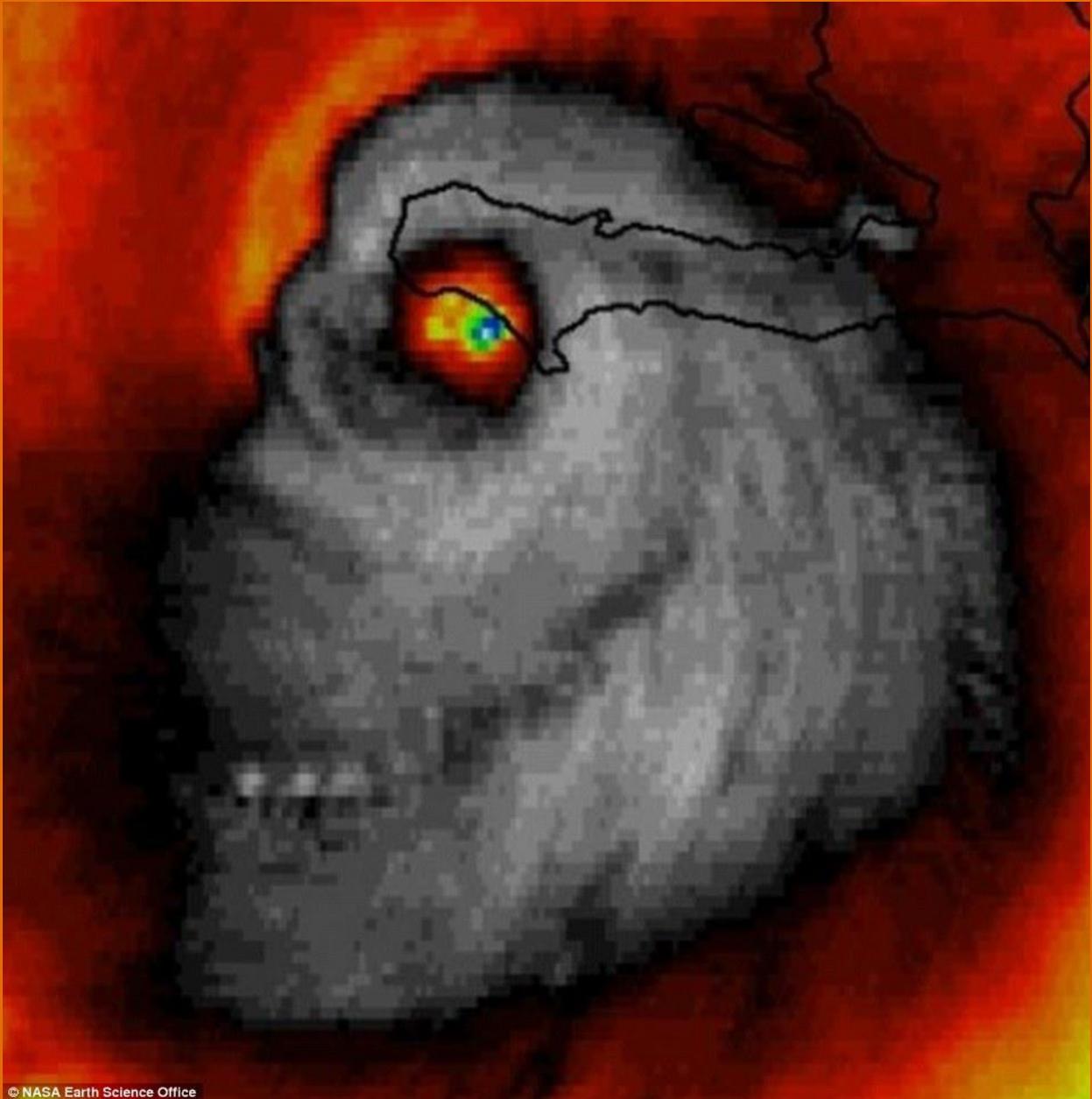
The creepy picture, which appears to show a white grinning skull with a glowing red eye, taken from a NASA satellite on Tuesday morning, shows the hurricane as it made landfall in Haiti. The eye, which is flecked with green at its very center, represents the real eye of the storm as it battered the beach resort of Les Cayes.

Many people online have taken the ominous image as a bad omen as the deadly storm moves towards to U.S.

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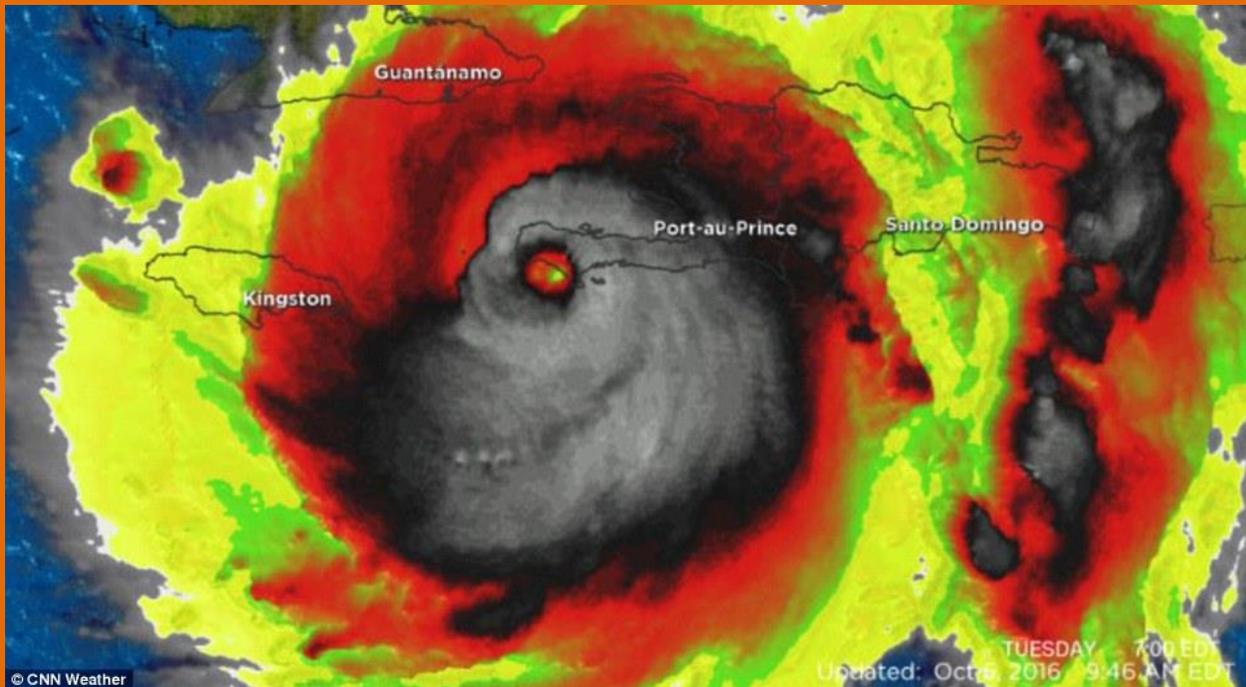
President Barack Obama on Wednesday said the U.S. government has teams and supplies positioned to respond to Hurricane Matthew.

'I want to emphasize to the public - this is a serious storm,' Obama said after a briefing at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. 'It has been building strength on its way to Florida.'



© NASA Earth Science Office

A eerie 'skull' appeared in satellite images of Hurricane Matthew yesterday, as the storm barrels towards the US



The creepy image, appears to show a white grinning skull, with a glowing red eye, flicked with green at its very center. It appeared in a weather map of the storm as it hit landfall in Haiti yesterday



Florida is on Hurricane Warning and Tropical Storm Warning, while Cuba and the Bahamas also remain on Hurricane Warning



People along the East Coast are flocking to hardware stores, grocery aisles and gas stations as the eerily skull-shaped Hurricane Matthew marches toward Florida



Hurricane Matthew is a strong and extremely dangerous Category 3 hurricane. The storm's eyewall is currently hammering eastern Cuba and western portions of Haiti but is predicted to move up through the U.S.



At 2pm today, the storm had moved north from Haiti towards Cuba and the Bahamas with wind speeds of 120mph



The hurricane is due to hit Florida on Friday and will move up the East Coast through the Carolinas over the weekend

The dangerous high winds and floods also caused massive landslides, destroying homes, businesses and electricity lines on the Caribbean islands.

Hurricane Matthew has now moved off the northeastern coast of Cuba, headed into the southern Bahamas and is on track to rake the Southeastern coast and trek north by Thursday.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley had warned yesterday she was prepared to evacuate one million people.

'This is not something that we want to play with,' Haley said. 'The worst-case scenario is that you get stuck on the coast and have no place to go.'

The National Guard is already mobilized in the state but as the storm is appearing to slow slightly, the governor has scaled back the planned evacuation. Instead, residents in Charleston and Beaufort are being ordered to leave at noon today as 315 are chartered to take people to safety.

Lane reversals on the road leading out of Charleston will begin at 3pm.

At a press conference this morning, she added that evacuations in Georgetown and Horry counties will be on Thursday.

At it's height, the hurricane was a Category 5 with wind speeds of more than 157 mph. Those speeds have dropped somewhat overtime and this morning Matthew had sustained speeds of 115mph, according to the National Hurricane Center, making it a Category 3 storm.

But forecasters predict it will strengthen to a Category 4 hurricane by the time it pummels Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.



People line up to fill their cars with gas in anticipation of Hurricane Matthew, in Coral Springs, Florida, October 5

The National Hurricane Center in Miami has just extended its hurricane watch in Florida to cover a 350-mile stretch from Deerfield Beach near Fort Lauderdale, to Fernandina Beach, meaning hurricane force winds of 74 mph or higher could occur within two days.

Matthew also could cause significant beach erosion all along the Atlantic coast, according to AccuWeather.

The worrying forecast was made all the more unsettling by the appearance of the strange skull formation in the weather map of Hurricane Matthew yesterday.

'I can confirm this satellite image of Matthew's landfall is REAL and not photoshopped,' said Matt Devitt, from the WINK News team in Florida, who noticed the skull while giving a forecast yesterday.

'Captured this morning during my weathercast. Freaky!'

Many were disturbed by the strange occurrence, calling the 'monstrous' picture a bad omen for the East Coast.

'East coast(sic) you better dig in this is an evil storm!' one viewer tweeted.

However, meteorologists were quick to assure the public that the image was simply a fluke, as the map used different colors used to identified the strongest part of the storm.

Schools in Broward County and Palm Beach County have cancelled classes on Thursday and Friday, CBS12 reported.

In South Florida, lines at grocery stores were heavier than usual and some essentials were in short supply.

When Simone Corrado and her husband tried to buy water at their Publix in Davie near Fort Lauderdale, they mostly found empty shelves.

There were a few bottles of high-end water brands, but there was so much empty shelf space that Corrado lay down and fully stretched out on the bottom shelf.

'I got scared because all that was left at Publix was just the pricey water,' said Corrado, who lived through 1992's catastrophic Hurricane Andrew, which practically leveled the nearby city of Homestead.

'They really put the fear into you here. On the television screen every few minutes is the 'beep, beep, beep' storm alert.'

Gov. Rick Scott, speaking in the Daytona area, warned residents they must be prepared to take a direct hit and evacuation orders could be issued as early as Tuesday.

Scott said his biggest worry is that residents won't take seriously the threat from Matthew, especially since so many newer residents have never lived through a hurricane.

'Don't take a chance. Leave before it's too late,' he said. 'We have to be prepared to be hit by a catastrophic hurricane.'

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal is declaring a state of emergency in 13 coastal counties because of Hurricane Matthew.

Deal's office issued a statement Tuesday saying he is ordering the state emergency management and homeland security offices to work with local agencies to protect residents and minimize risks.

The state of emergency begins Wednesday and includes the port city of Savannah and Brunswick to the south.

The White House said President Barack Obama canceled a campaign and health care events in Florida on Wednesday and would instead visit the headquarters of the Federal Emergency Management Agency for an update.

While the storm's exact track isn't yet known, Deal says the storm could get dangerously close to the state's coast within 72 hours.

Hurricane Hermine became the first to strike Florida since Wilma in 2005 when it hit the eastern Panhandle on September 2 as a Category 1 storm, causing one death, storm surge damage to beachfront homes and downed trees and powerlines.

That 11-year lull between storms hitting Florida was the longest on record.

The last storm to hit the Atlantic side of Florida was Hurricane Katrina, which struck in 2005 on its way to devastating the Gulf coast.

Wilma made landfall as a Category 3 storm with 120 mph winds, killing five people as it pushed from southwest Florida, through the Everglades and into the Fort Lauderdale and Palm Beach area, causing an estimated \$21 billion in damage and leaving thousands of residents without power for more than a week.

It concluded a two-year span when a record eight hurricanes hit the state.

Near Miami Beach, The Home Depot in Davie briefly ran out of propane for gas barbecues and the supply of batteries was dwindling.

People bought plywood to cover windows, tarps to put over outdoor furniture and coolers for food storage.

Anesthesiologist Darby Lipka lugged a 20-pound propane tank across the parking lot, saying he had already purchased food and water. He installed hurricane windows years ago so he wouldn't need to erect shutters

'I am just trying to be prepared,' he said.

Dane Vaala, a diesel mechanic, was loading plywood onto his pickup. He needed it so he could stand on his awning to install upper floor shutters at his home.

He moved to Florida from Montana in 2007, so Matthew would be his first storm. He had loaded up on canned food and water.

'I'm not too concerned — it doesn't really bother me much,' he said. 'But it is better to prep.'

Haley said state officials would reverse lanes on major evacuation routes in South Carolina.

It would be the first major evacuation since Hurricane Floyd in 1999, when the governor at the time didn't reverse the lanes and Interstate 26 became a parking lot.

A typically two-hour drive from Charleston to Columbia turned into 24-hour nightmare.

'We've been through winter storms. We've been through a 1,000-year flood. A hurricane is different. I don't want anyone to look at the last couple of tragedies we've gone through and think this is similar,' Haley said.

Some airlines are letting passengers change travel plans without penalty if their trip might be affected by Hurricane Matthew.

United Airlines said Tuesday that it will waive change fees and any difference in fare for customers scheduled to fly Wednesday through Friday to, from or through five airports in Florida.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3822012/Anxiety-high-US-coast-residents-eye-Hurricane-Matthew.html#v-4866078575320349714>

Delta Air Lines is waiving change fees on trips through Wednesday in the Caribbean and through Thursday at eight Florida destinations, although differences in the fare would still apply.

Strong winds and heavy rain hit Haiti on Thursday, as a United Nations official said Hurricane Matthew has caused the biggest humanitarian crisis in Haiti since the devastating earthquake of 2010.

At least five are dead, including a 26-year-old man who drowned trying to rescue a child who fell into flood waters. The child was saved, authorities said. One woman was killed by a falling electrical pole.

More than 430,000 were evacuated from the island, the poorest region in the Western Hemisphere, ahead of the hurricane.

'You could see a death toll in the thousands,' Colorado State University meteorologist Phil Klotzbach had warned as life-threatening 145mph winds and heavy rain battered the island.

Deputy Special Representative for Haiti Mourad Wahba says in a statement that many people have been forced from their homes and communications systems have been knocked out in the country's hard-hit southwestern peninsula. He said at least 10,000 people are in shelters.

Wahba says officials have received reports of destroyed houses and overflowing hospitals, with shortages fresh water. He also says the hospital in the city of Les Cayes had its roof blown off.

But with a key bridge washed out, roads impassable and phone communications down, the western tip of Haiti was isolated and there was no word on dead and injured.

Hours after Matthew swept onto the remote area with 145 mph winds, government leaders said they weren't close to fully gauging the impact in the vulnerable, flood-prone country where less powerful storms have killed thousands.

International aid efforts were stymied Tuesday because of the lack of access to the hardest-hit areas, many residents of flooded areas seen by Associated Press reporters were wading through shin-high waters.

Muddy rivers and tributaries continued to rise as water flowed down hillsides and mountains, making more flash floods and mudslides possible even Matthew tracked away from the country.

Today, the hurricane moved northwards, battering the Bahamas and parts of Cuba including Guantanamo Bay where seven hundred military family members were evacuated from over the weekend in anticipation of the storm.

Several cruise ships are being rerouted from their regularly scheduled Caribbean and Bahamas ports to Key West. Key West is about 40 miles south of the portion of the Florida not currently under a tropical storm warning.

As Hurricane Matthew approaches the Bahamas, officials say nine Royal Bahamas Defence Force vessels have moored at Truman Harbor in Key West.

Naval Air Station Key West spokeswoman Trice Denny says a University of Miami Rosentiel School research called the Whalton Smith is expected to arrive in port in Key West on Wednesday.

Officials are also expecting the USNS Spearhead on Saturday, a 337-foot-long joint (Navy/Army) high-speed catamaran vessel, to be positioned in Key West for possible aid missions.

The Department of State had also authorized family members of US government employees to depart the Bahamas, and issued a travel warning for the area.

Matthew was at one point a Category 5 storm, making it the most powerful hurricane in the region in nearly a decade. It blew ashore around dawn in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and a place where many people live in shacks of wood or concrete blocks.

Bahamas Prime Minister Perry Christie voiced concern about the potential impact on the sprawling archipelago off Florida's east coast.

'We're worried because we do not control nature,' he said.

Seven hundred military family members were evacuated from Naval Station Guantanamo Bay in Cuba over the weekend in anticipation of the storm. The Department of State has authorized family members of US government employees to depart the Bahamas, and has issued a travel warning for the area.

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