

Meteorologists: Wilma wasn't major

Meteorologists say Wilma was a less-than-major hurricane as it crossed Florida Oct. 24, leaving nearly 6 million South Floridians without power.

The hurricane struck extreme Southwest Florida as a Category 3 storm, with top winds around 121 mph. But populated areas of the state felt no more than a Category 2 storm, carrying sustained winds as high as 110 mph, and much of the region felt considerably less, the Palm Beach (Fla.) Post reported.

Wilma, which a peculiarly large 75-mile-wide eye, caused damage estimated at \$12.2 billion in the United States and killed 22 people, including five in Florida.

Before hitting Florida, Wilma gained the distinction of becoming the strongest hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean as it headed toward Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula with sustained winds of 184 mph.

The National Hurricane Center in Miami acknowledges its data may be less than complete since wind gauges often stopped reporting data after losing power, the Post said. So, in many cases, the highest wind speed recorded might not be the highest wind speed that occurred.

"People should say this is our best estimate based on the available data," said hurricane center specialist Jack Beven.

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