



The Met. Office

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SCIENCE, ENVIRONMENT, INSURANCE AND CITY EDITORS.

UK SCIENTISTS REVEAL US HURRICANE STRIKES FOR YEAR 2000.

Three tropical storms and one hurricane are expected to strike US shores between June and November 2000, a team of UK scientists said today.

Dr Mark Saunders and Dr Paul Rockett of the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre at University College London have developed the longest range forecast for US hurricane strikes yet - and a year ahead of the 2000 hurricane season.

Using a similar model the team predicted in December 1998 that the 1999 American hurricane season and US strike total would both be above average. Their forecast of four tropical storms, two hurricanes and one intense hurricane reaching US landfall agrees well with actual landfalling totals to date - five tropical storms, three hurricanes and one intense hurricane. A further prediction of 12 Atlantic tropical storms and 7 hurricanes in the same year closely matches the observed totals so far of 11 tropical storms and 7 hurricanes.

Dr Saunders and Dr Rockett's work is supported by a joint venture between the UK Government and a consortium of UK insurance companies - the TSUNAMI Initiative. The tropical cyclone forecasts are endorsed by the Met. Office who co-ordinated the project and provided meteorological data and expertise. Insurers and risk managers will benefit greatly from the data - the forecasts have been designed with their interests in mind and their timing provides ample scope to review existing windstorm policies.

The forecast predicts that during the 1st June - 30th November 2000 hurricane season landfalling impacts will be 80-85% of average for the US as a whole. Three tropical storms and one hurricane are expected to strike. In addition, activity on the U.S East Coast is forecast to be 70-80% of average, and activity on the U.S. Gulf Coast to be 85-90% of average.

The forecast was prepared using advanced statistical methods and historical climate data back to 1950. The team's predictors comprise a mix of current climate parameters and model predictions of climate

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parameters at the time of the 2000 hurricane season. The main factors in the forecast are the summer 2000 predictions for slightly cooler than average sea surface temperatures in the tropical north Atlantic and a weak positive ENSO phase. Both factors are associated with decreased Atlantic hurricane activity

David Simmons, TSUNAMI board representative for Benfield Greig - one of the seven companies sponsoring the consortium - welcomed the forecast saying: "The work of Dr Saunders and his team continues to advance our knowledge and understanding of the factors that influence the frequency and severity of these potentially catastrophic events. Greater predictability benefits not only the insurance industry but also society as a whole".

Mike Cooper, TSUNAMI board representative for the CGU Group, praised the scientists efforts and commented: "The insurance industry has operated for many years with only limited data on the hazards that drive its claims experience. This is our first attempt to take leading-edge science and tailor it to meet our competitive needs. We are delighted with the progress to date".

Hurricanes rank above earthquakes and floods as the United States' costliest natural disaster. The US hurricane damage bill for 1990-1998 averages £3.5 billion per year so even forecasts with modest skill can create huge financial savings. To be of value to insurers, forecasts must be received well before the hurricane season. Dr Saunders and Dr Rockett issued their prediction to TSUNAMI on 1st October 1999 three months ahead of the insurance industry's major renewal season.

Hurricanes also occur in other ocean basins where they are called typhoons or cyclones. Dr Saunders' team will be applying their model to issue TSUNAMI with the first ever long-range forecasts for typhoons striking Japan, Taiwan and other NW Pacific countries in early January 2000, and for cyclones hitting Queensland, Australia, on 1st April 2000.

The full forecast can be viewed as a PDF download on the TSUNAMI web site at: http://www.nerc-bas.ac.uk/public/tsunami/frames/tcfp_frame.html.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The TSUNAMI initiative was established in response to the Foresight Programme, a UK Government initiative aimed at stimulating improved dialogue between academia and industry. TSUNAMI was formed in September 1997 by Dr Dougal Goodman, Deputy Director of the British Antarctic Survey a component part of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). It aims to improve the competitiveness of the insurance industry by using UK scientific expertise to improve the assessment of risk. TSUNAMI's three year programme is funded jointly by the Government through the Department of Trade and Industry's Sector Challenge and by a consortium from the UK insurance industry comprising:

UK Composite Companies: CGU Group, Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Group

Lloyd's Reinsurance Brokers: Benfield Greig Group, Guy Carpenter

Lloyd's Managing Agencies: Catlin Underwriting Agencies Ltd, DP Mann Ltd,
Wren Syndicates Management Ltd