

'Above-average' hurricane season predicted

Cooling waters in the Pacific due to a weakening El Nino phenomenon and strong warming in the tropical Atlantic add up to a higher chance that a major hurricane will hit US or Caribbean coasts this year, experts forecast Wednesday.

With that recipe for potential disaster, "we anticipate an above-average probability of United States and Caribbean major hurricane landfall," experts at Colorado State University warned in a report.

"The predicted weakening of El Nino conditions combined with a very strong anomalous warming of the tropical Atlantic... will lead to favorable dynamic and thermodynamic conditions for hurricane formation and intensification," they said.

The chance that a major hurricane with sustained winds of more than 178 km/h will hit the US coast is 69 percent for the hurricane season that begins June 1, well above the average of 52 percent for the last century.

The US state of Florida which usually has a 31-percent chance of being hit by a hurricane, this year has a 45-percent chance, forecasters said.

For the US Gulf coast, on which the biggest US oil refineries sit, the chance of a hurricane hit is 44 percent this year compared to the average risk of 30 percent, CSU forecasters said.

Across the Caribbean, the chance of a hurricane hit this season is 58 percent, well above the average of 42 percent, they said in the report which updated earlier forecasts announced in December.

The seasonal predictions are for 15 named tropical storms, of which eight will be hurricanes and four will be major systems measuring three or more on the Saffir-Simpson scale, which tops out at five.

The Atlantic hurricane season stretches from June 1 to November 30.