

Tropical Storm Sandy on course to hit Jamaica

Tropical Storm Sandy, which formed in the western Caribbean Sea late Monday, is expected to become a hurricane on Wednesday as it approaches Jamaica, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

The storm was centered about 395 miles south-southwest of Kingston, Jamaica, and had top sustained winds of 45 miles per hour. A hurricane watch was issued for Jamaica, where strong winds and rain is expected to begin on Tuesday. The storm did not pose a threat to the Gulf of Mexico, where U.S. oil and gas operations are clustered. A tropical storm warning was in effect for Jamaica, meaning residents should expect heavy rains and strong winds within 24 to 36 hours. "Right now we just have to hope and pray and keep watch," said Antonette Fisher, a resident of New Haven, a community with a history of flooding whenever it rains, to the Jamaica Observer. Computer models showed Sandy was on a projected path that would carry it over Jamaica on Wednesday and then eastern Cuba and the Bahamas. "If the rain should come and fall like how it did a few months ago, we fear that we may lose our homes," said resident Winston Higgins told the paper. Sandy is expected to dump as much as 5 to 10 inches of rain across parts of Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and eastern Cuba, forecasters said. Residents were warned that the harsh weather could spark flash floods and mudslides.