

Tropical Storm Erika Kills At Least 12 in Caribbean

The governor of Florida declared a state of emergency Friday ahead of Tropical Storm Erika, which has killed at least 12 people as it rakes the Caribbean.

. Rick Scott said the storm constitutes a "severe threat." It is forecast to hit Florida on Monday, but it's not clear how strong the storm will be. "We've got concerns all across the state now because it's going to be coming clear across the state," Scott told reporters. He spoke soon after forecasters said it was likely to strike the southern tip of Florida before traveling north of Tampa. Erika may not be a tropical storm by then. The National Hurricane Center said in a 5 p.m. Friday forecast that it is expected to weaken over the next 48 hours, and could be downgraded to a tropical depression by Saturday. The storm was bringing heavy rains and winds to the Dominican Republic and was 95 miles west-southwest of Santo Domingo, the Hurricane Center said. Maximum sustained winds were 50 mph. Scott encouraged families to make sure they have a disaster plan — particularly those who have moved to Florida since the last time it was struck by a hurricane a decade ago. Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez told reporters Friday afternoon that he had no plans for evacuation orders as of now. "Unless something changes, we do not anticipate having to open up any shelters," he said, but cautioned people should be prepared for a major "rain event." "Have three days of food and three days of water," he said. President Barack Obama was briefed on preparations for a possible landfall in the U.S., a White House official said. Roosevelt Skerrit, the prime minister of the Caribbean island of Dominica, tweeted that 12 people were confirmed dead in heavy flooding there, "but the number may be higher." He appealed for fresh water and supplies. He said he was on his way to Petite Savanne, the area hit hardest. He said he did not know how many people were hurt. Tropical Storm Erika Passes Caribbean Islands 0:30 Torrents of water flowed through the streets of Dominica, The Associated Press reported, sweeping away cars and causing deadly landslides. More than a foot of rain fell in less than 12 hours, the National Weather Service said. There is a chance Erika would deliver almost as much rain on Friday to Puerto Rico, which was being battered with rain and wind Friday. The weather service said the storm would move near Turks and Caicos on Friday night and near the Bahamas over the weekend. Tropical storm conditions were also expected to spread across Haiti Friday. Sometime Sunday night, it should reach Florida, but it's expected to weaken as it moves over land Friday, according to NBC News meteorologist Bill Karins. "Erika has chosen to move across the Caribbean islands in the most difficult path possible," Karins said. "All those mountains will tear the storm apart." Erika's thunderstorms should dissipate over the mountains of the Dominican Republic on Friday, and it will be probably be downgraded to a depression or tropical wave in the next 24 hours, Karins said. By Monday or Tuesday, Erika's remnants should move north to deliver a much-needed soak to the Southeast. Emergency agencies from Florida to North Carolina weren't taking any chances.