



Extended Range Forecast for Atlantic Hurricane Activity in 2009

Issued: 5th December 2008

by Professor Mark Saunders and Dr Adam Lea
Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre, UCL (University College London), UK

Forecast Summary

TSR predicts another active Atlantic hurricane season in 2009. Users should note that the precision of TSR's extended range outlooks for Atlantic hurricane activity between 1984 and 2008 is low.

The TSR (Tropical Storm Risk) extended range forecast for Atlantic hurricane activity in 2009 anticipates another active season. Based on current and projected climate signals, Atlantic basin and US landfalling tropical cyclone activity are forecast to be 35% above the 1950-2008 norm in 2009. There is a fairly high (~63%) likelihood that activity will be in the top one-third of years historically. The forecast spans the period from 1st June to 30th November 2009 and employs data through to the end of November 2008. TSR's two predictors are the forecast July-September 2009 trade wind speed over the Caribbean and tropical North Atlantic, and the forecast August-September 2009 sea surface temperature in the tropical North Atlantic. The former influences cyclonic vorticity (the spinning up of storms) in the main hurricane track region, while the latter provides heat and moisture to power incipient storms in the main track region. At present TSR anticipates both predictors having a moderate enhancing effect on activity.

Atlantic ACE Index and System Numbers in 2009

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2009	136 (\pm 60)	3.5 (\pm 1.8)	7.7 (\pm 2.8)	14.8 (\pm 4.3)
59yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2008	102 (\pm 60)	2.7 (\pm 1.9)	6.2 (\pm 2.6)	10.4 (\pm 4.0)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1984-2008	7%	5%	0%	2%

- Key: ACE Index = Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index = Sum of the Squares of 6-hourly Maximum Sustained Wind Speeds (in units of knots) for all Systems while they are at least Tropical Storm Strength. ACE Unit = $\times 10^4$ knots².
- Intense Hurricane = 1 Minute Sustained Wind > 95Kts = Hurricane Category 3 to 5.
Hurricane = 1 Minute Sustained Wind > 63Kts = Hurricane Category 1 to 5.
Tropical Storm = 1 Minute Sustained Wind > 33Kts.
SD = Standard Deviation.
FE (Forecast Error) = Standard Deviation of Errors in Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1984-2008.
Forecast Skill = Percentage Improvement in Mean Square Error over Running 10-year Prior Climate Norm from Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1984-2008.

There is a 63% probability that the 2009 Atlantic hurricane season ACE index will be above average (defined as an ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>116)), a 23% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (71 to 116) and only a 14% chance it will be below-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<71)). The 59-year period 1950-2008 is used for climatology.

- Key: Terciles = Data groupings of equal (33.3%) probability corresponding to the upper, middle and lower one-third of values historically (1950-2008).
Upper Tercile = ACE index value greater than 116.
Middle Tercile = ACE index value between 71 and 116.
Lower Tercile = ACE index value less than 71.

ACE Index & Numbers Forming in the MDR, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico in 2009

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2009	109 (\pm 57)	3.2(\pm 1.6)	5.5 (\pm 2.5)	9.8 (\pm 3.7)
59yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2008	79 (\pm 58)	2.4 (\pm 1.8)	4.3 (\pm 2.4)	7.1 (\pm 3.4)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1984-2008	10%	9%	5%	4%

The Atlantic hurricane Main Development Region (MDR) is the region 10°N - 20°N, 20°W - 60°W between the Cape Verde Islands and the Caribbean Lesser Antilles. A storm is defined as having formed within this region if it reached at least tropical depression status while in the area.

There is a 62% probability that in 2009 the MDR, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico ACE index will be above average (defined as an ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>92)), a 26% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (41 to 92) and only a 12% chance it will be below-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<41)). The 59-year period 1950-2008 is used for climatology.

USA Landfalling ACE Index and Numbers in 2009

		ACE Index	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2009	3.4 (\pm 2.1)	2.1 (\pm 1.6)	4.7 (\pm 2.2)
59yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2008	2.4 (\pm 2.2)	1.5 (\pm 1.3)	3.2 (\pm 2.0)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1984-2008	6%	12%	10%

Key: ACE Index = Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index = Sum of the Squares of hourly Maximum Sustained Wind Speeds (in units of knots) for all Systems while they are at least Tropical Storm Strength and over the USA Mainland (reduced by a factor of 6). ACE Unit = $\times 10^4$ knots².

Landfall Strike Category = Maximum 1 Minute Sustained Wind of Storm Directly Striking Land.
USA Mainland = Brownsville (Texas) to Maine.

USA landfalling intense hurricanes are not forecast since we have no skill at any lead.

There is a 64% probability that in 2009 the USA landfalling ACE index will be above average (defined as a USA ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>2.60)), a 21% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (1.15 to 2.60) and only a 15% chance it will be below-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<1.15)). The 59-year period 1950-2008 is used for climatology.

Caribbean Lesser Antilles Landfalling Numbers in 2009

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2009	1.8 (\pm 2.2)	0.3 (\pm 0.4)	0.6 (\pm 0.6)	1.4 (\pm 1.0)
59yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2008	1.4 (\pm 2.0)	0.2 (\pm 0.5)	0.5 (\pm 0.7)	1.1 (\pm 1.0)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1984-2008	0%	0%	9%	0%

Key: ACE Index = Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index = Sum of the Squares of hourly Maximum Sustained Wind Speeds (in units of knots) for all Systems while they are at least Tropical Storm Strength and within the boxed region (10°N-18°N,60°W-63°W) (reduced by a factor of 6). ACE Unit = $\times 10^4$ knots².

Landfall Strike Category = Maximum 1 Minute Sustained Wind of Storm Directly Striking Land.
Lesser Antilles = Island Arc from Anguilla to Trinidad Inclusive.

Key Predictors for 2009

The key factors behind the TSR forecast for an above-average hurricane season in 2009 are the anticipated moderate enhancing effect of July-September forecast trade winds at 925mb height over the Caribbean Sea and tropical North Atlantic region (7.5°N - 17.5°N, 30°W - 100°W), and of August-September forecast sea surface temperature for the Atlantic MDR (10°N - 20°N, 20°W - 60°W). The current forecasts for these predictors are $0.37 \pm 0.78 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ weaker than normal (1979-2008 climatology) and $0.12 \pm 0.30^\circ\text{C}$ warmer than normal (1979-2008 climatology). The forecast skills (assessed for the period 1984-2008) for these predictors at this lead are 32% and 28% respectively.

The Precision of Seasonal Hurricane Forecasts

The 2004, 2005 and 2008 North Atlantic and U.S. landfalling hurricane seasons were both predicted to have 'high activity' (i.e. within the top one third of years historically) to high (65-70%) probability from the previous December. However, the extended range forecasts for the 2006 and 2007 hurricane seasons proved less impressive. The precision of seasonal Atlantic hurricane forecasts as a function of issue time is assessed over many years in this recent article:

Saunders, M. A., Winds of change, *Post Magazine Risk Report*, pp28-29, 9 November 2006, <http://tsr.mssl.ucl.ac.uk/docs/Hurricanes-Post09112006.pdf>

Users should be aware that the skill of TSR's extended range forecasts for Atlantic hurricane activity over the last 25 years, while positive, is low.

Further Information and Next Forecast

Further information about TSR forecasts, verifications and hindcast skill as a function of lead time may be obtained from the TSR web site <http://tropicalstormrisk.com>. The first TSR forecast update for the 2009 Atlantic hurricane season will be issued on Monday 6th April 2009.

