Hurricane Andrew

Hurricanes are a fact of life in the Southeast. But Hurricane Andrew was different. It was one of the worst disasters in the history of the United States. How did Hurricane Andrew affect daily life in Florida?
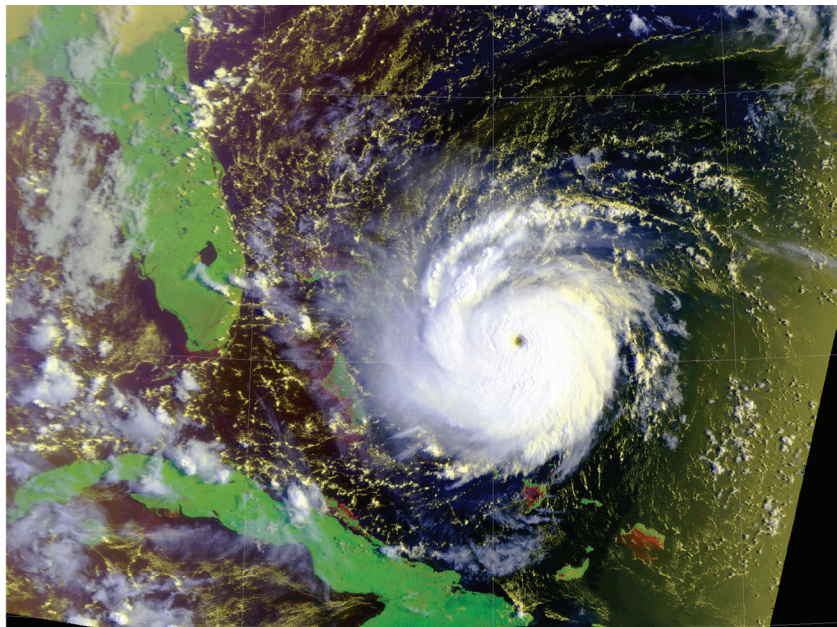
On August 24, 1992, Hurricane Andrew hit south Florida. The howling winds sounded almost hungry to some people.

David Fisher turned on his television to find out what was happening. The news reporter said that the instruments measuring the wind had just blown off the roof of the National Hurricane Center. Then the lights—and the television—went out in the Fisher house.

Dan Sanabria also remembers the noise. He thought that it sounded like a jet plane taking off. He will also never forget what the storm did to his house. "When the eye of [the storm] passed over, I went out for a look, and we had no roof."

After Hurricane Andrew, the Shropshire family had only one thing left. It was the bed that Pearlie Shropshire and her son, Travis, were hiding under. Everything else was gone.

This picture was taken about one day before Hurricane Andrew hit Florida. The dot on this satellite photograph shows the eye, or center, of the storm.

A Storm Is Coming

One week before Hurricane Andrew hit Florida, the National Weather Service announced that a storm was on the way. It said that the first tropical storm of 1992 was moving slowly toward the United States. It had winds of about 50 miles per hour, which meant that it was already a stronger storm than most. However, not many people paid attention because many storms and hurricanes occur in Florida every year.

The warm, sunny climate is one of the main reasons why so many people go to Florida—to visit and to live. In fact, Florida is one of the fastest-growing states in the country. More than 5,000 people move to Florida every week. However, the warm climate there also leads to the formation of hurricanes.

The number of hurricanes that threaten Florida each year varies. An average year might have about three big hurricanes. But not all of them hit land. In 2004, four hurricanes hit Florida. That was more than in any other year on record. In 2006, not one hurricane hit the state.

Hurricanes like Andrew are rare. But three-fourths of all people in Florida live on or near the coasts. So, when a storm like Andrew hits, it creates problems for most people in the state.

More than 13 million people live along Florida's coasts. They live in small towns and in big cities like Miami.

The Storm Hits

As Hurricane Andrew came closer to the United States, its winds grew stronger and stronger. Now people began to pay attention.

Television and radio announcers urged people to leave the area. More than a million people did leave. As they did, highways going north became jammed solid with cars. But millions of other people chose to stay.

According to scientist David Fisher, "the scariest place on Earth is directly in the path of an onrushing hurricane." Others have compared the energy of a hurricane to that of a very powerful bomb exploding.

Andrew was 60 miles wide before it touched land. Compared to other hurricanes, it wasn't large, but it was very strong. Its winds reached 175 miles an hour. That is strong enough to tear buildings apart, blow big trees down, and pick up cars and people as if they were toys.

Scientists choose a number from 1 to 5 to describe the force of a hurricane. Category 1 is the mildest. Hurricane Andrew was named a Category 5 hurricane.

Hurricane Andrew brought violent winds and flooding rains to Florida and other states. This person is walking through the powerful winds of the hurricane.

Path of Hurricane Andrew

South Carolina
Mississippi
Alabama
Georgia
Louisiana
Texas
Florida
30°N
Gulf of Mexico
Miami
25°N
FLORIDA KEYS
80°W
N
W E
S

0   150   300 miles
0   150   300 kilometers

← Path of Hurricane Andrew

95°W   90°W   85°W

Hurricane Andrew's winds caused a lot of destruction around Miami. This car was overturned by the hurricane.

After the Storm

Eventually, Andrew moved on into the Gulf of Mexico toward Louisiana. But it left behind a huge disaster in Florida.

More than forty people were dead. More than 250,000 people were homeless, and thousands of houses were completely destroyed. Many businesses were gone. The damage to homes, businesses, and land eventually cost about 30 *billion* dollars.

People's lives were changed forever. "I went to bed with two jobs and a home," Charles Wilson said. "I woke up with no jobs and a piece of a home."

Many people went back to Florida to rebuild their homes and communities. But about 30,000 people left the heavily populated south Florida county, Dade County, for good.

For a long time after the storm, whenever Dan Sanabria walked outside, he would look around for places he could take shelter in a storm. For Dan and for all those people who lived through Hurricane Andrew, the memory of that fierce storm is hard to forget. ◆

Hurricane Andrew devastated Florida's communities. But the people of Florida worked together to help others find food, clothing, and shelter.