

The bad news for Caribbean cruisers: Hurricane season could be fierce

By [Gene Sloan](#), USA TODAY / Posted May 27 2010 11:11AM

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Planning a Caribbean cruise for the coming summer or fall? Here's the bad news: A worse-than-normal hurricane season is on the way.

That's the word from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is predicting an above-average year of tropical storms for the Atlantic basin.

The agency's forecast for 2010, released today, calls for 14 to 23 named storms in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico.

Of those named storms, 8 to 14 should become hurricanes, including 3 to 7 "major" hurricanes, with wind speeds above 111 mph, the agency says.

Tropical storms are given a name when wind speeds reach 39 mph, and are upgraded to hurricane status when sustained winds reach 74 mph. An average Atlantic hurricane season sees 11 named storms, including six hurricanes, with two becoming major hurricanes.

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"If this outlook holds true, this season could be one of the more active on record," NOAA chief Jane Lubchenco said today at a press conference.

As USA TODAY weather reporter Doyle Rice [notes today](#) in a story on the forecast, researchers are blaming the expected increase in activity on a weakening El Nino and record warm Atlantic Ocean water, among other factors.

The NOAA forecast is similar to [earlier predictions](#) by researchers at Colorado State University, who said in April that they expected 15 named storms.

The hurricane season officially kicks off on June 1 and lasts through Nov. 30.

NOAA forecasts for named tropical storms and hurricanes have been accurate in five out of the 10 years in this decade, according to a USA TODAY analysis. The agency's prediction was too low in four years, and too high in one year (2006).