https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/19/houston-texas-state-of-emergency-deadly-floods

Texas flooding kills at least five people as state braces for more severe weather

**Houston among areas hardest hit and more than a thousand homes have been evacuated but city attempts to return to normal operations**

[**Tom Dart**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/tom-dart) *in Houston and Associated Press*

Houston braced for the threat of more severe weather on Tuesday, a day after a deluge killed at least [six people](http://www.chron.com/houston/article/More-flooding-possible-as-thunderstorms-hit-7256960.php) and left more than a thousand homes flooded.

Harris County’s emergency management office said that there were 1,200 high water rescues on Monday as a slow-moving storm system dumped more than a foot of rain on many parts of the US’s fourth-largest city.

The National Weather Service extended a flash flood watch to 7am CT on Wednesday and warned of a “favorable weather pattern that will support periods of rain/storms through Thursday” and could bring an additional two-four inches of rain on ground that is already saturated, though conditions made a confident forecast impossible.

Bayous burst their banks and many roads were impassable, including sections of major freeways. Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster in nine [Texas](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/texas) counties. The Harris County flood control district said in a statement that 240bn gallons of rainwater fell over the county in less than 24 hours, causing 13 bayous and creeks to flood, and that residents in 110 subdivisions reported house flooding.

Public transport resumed service on Tuesday and Sylvester Turner, Houston’s mayor, said the city was returning to normal operations. Still, some main roads and many school districts remained closed and about 10,000 households were without power, down from a peak of 123,000. The Red Cross opened 12 shelters in the region. Officials cautioned that floodwaters could contain snakes, dangerous insects, germs and pollution.

The Harris county chief administrator, Judge Ed Emmett, said two bodies were found in a vehicle that had been seen on traffic cameras driving around barricades and unsuccessfully attempting to navigate a flooded underpass.

Another person, believed to be a contractor with the city’s airport system, was found in a submerged vehicle. A fourth person, a truck driver, was found dead in his cab after encountering high water on a freeway service road.

In nearby Waller County, a man was found in a submerged vehicle which investigators believed was caught in rushing water, the [Houston](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/houston) Chronicle reported.

More than 70 horses were [reportedly rescued](http://abc13.com/pets/video-dozens-of-horses-rescued-from-flood-waters/1297082/) after being trapped in floodwater at stables near a creek.

The National Weather Service said that 9.92in of rain fell at George Bush intercontinental airport, the second highest one-day tally on record. Areas to the west and north-west of the city saw the most rainfall, with 14-17in in some places between Sunday evening and Monday morning. The airport said on Monday that about 800 flights were cancelled and more than 150 delayed.

With its low-lying Gulf coast location, soft soil and fast-growing urban sprawl, reducing the natural capacity of the land to absorb rainwater, Houston is no stranger to flooding. Last year, Sam Brody, director of Texas A&M University’s Center for Texas Beaches and Shores, [called it the](http://www.northjersey.com/news/floods-in-vulnerable-houston-no-surprise-despite-controls-1.1344453) “number one city in America to be injured and die in a flood”.

Still, this was described as the worst flood event since Tropical Storm Allison hit south-east Texas in 2001, killing 22 people in Harris County alone. Parts of Texas and Oklahoma were badly hit by storms and floods last Memorial Day weekend [that killed at least 31 people](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/may/31/texas-floods-damage-missing-deaths) and caused an estimated $45m of damage in Houston, affecting about 1,500 homes in Harris County.

Among the worst-impacted places were Meyerland, a neighborhood to the southwest of downtown Houston that borders a bayou – where some homes had only recently been restored after the Memorial Day 2015 floods – and Greenspoint, near Bush airport, which was the scene of some dramatic rescues. One woman and her young child were [pictured floating to safety](http://www.khou.com/news/desperate-residents-flee-floodwaters-in-greenspoint/141300335) using a refrigerator as a raft.

Several hundred Greenspoint residents sought refuge in a nearby sports arena that was turned into an emergency shelter, with about a hundred green folding beds set up on the floor of what would normally be a basketball court. The entrance hall buzzed with activity on Tuesday afternoon as volunteers took registrations and handed out supplies.

Deconda Johnson was at home in her ground-floor Greenspoint apartment when water started rushing in. “Within 30-45 minutes it was all the way over our couch,” the 47-year-old student and caregiver told the Guardian. “Everything was very frightening”. She went upstairs to a neighbour’s apartment. A rescue team took her by boat from the submerged apartment complex to a nearby freeway, where a bus shuttled her to the shelter and she was able to take a shower, put on clean clothes and use the internet.

Standing by her temporary bed, with blankets, a pillow and toiletries, Johnson was hoping to return to her apartment and assess the damage on Wednesday. She is worried that her home will be uninhabitable, which would cause severe disruption with her college finals exams only a couple of weeks away.

Some of the housing developments included adequate green space for water runoff, but not all, said Philip Bedient, an engineering professor at Rice University.

“Could we have engineered our way out of this?” Bedient said. “Only if we started talking about alterations 35 or 40 years ago.”

He said improving the monitoring of specific watersheds and flood-prone areas might give residents the extra time needed to take protective measures and possibly save lives.

“We can’t solve this flood problem in Houston. All we can do is a better job warning.” 