

## Barry Closes In

**By Dan Copp / Staff Writer**

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### Heavy rain and potential flooding are the biggest concerns for Terrebonne and Lafourche.

Rain continues to be the main concern for the Houma-Thibodaux area as Tropical Storm Barry churns toward the coast, forecasters said.

“The main concern is the flash-flood threat. It’s a very high potential given the amount of rain we’re expecting,” Robert Ricks, lead forecaster at the National Weather Service in Slidell, said Friday night.

Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes are likely to see 10-20 inches of rain through Sunday, and some spots could receive as much as 25 inches, he said.

As of 7 p.m. Friday, Barry was 85 miles southeast of Morgan City moving west-northwest at 5 mph. It was projected to make landfall early Saturday near Morgan City, with forecasts varying on whether it will be a strong tropical storm or a Category 1 hurricane, with winds of at least 74 mph.

“The storm has strengthened up to 65 mph winds,” Kevin Gilmore, a Weather Service meteorologist in Slidell, said Friday afternoon. “The track still strengthens it as a minimal hurricane right before landfall early tomorrow morning. The track takes it fairly close to Houma. It will be a little west, but we stress to people not to just focus on the center track. The greater effects will be to the east of the center, which includes all of southern Louisiana.”

The slow-moving storm’s flooding potential prompted Terrebonne, Lafourche and Thibodaux officials to enact curfews. Terrebonne’s curfew was set to run from 10 p.m. Friday to 10 a.m. Saturday. Thibodaux’s curfew ran from 10 p.m. Friday to 6 a.m. Saturday and the curfew in Lafourche will be from 10 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Saturday.

“We need to let these first-responders have access to all of the roads like fire, police and medical services,” Terrebonne Parish President Gordy Dove said.

Storm surge and wind will also pose a threat to the area, forecasters said.

“Terrebonne Parish is under a storm-surge warning as well as a hurricane warning,” Gilmore said. “Isolated tornadoes can’t be ruled out as well. The sustained wind gusts will be substantial at times late tonight and early tomorrow. There will also be lingering rain bands behind it.”

Terrebonne and Lafourche officials said the area’s levees and floodgates should repel the expected 3- to- 6-foot storm surge. But the surge, as well as sustained south winds, could prevent rain and floodwater from draining out of the area into the Gulf, worsening any flooding.

“As long as the water gets out our pumps can handle it,” Dove said. “It’s a matter of getting the water through the pump stations. Residents need to do everything they can to keep the ditches and catch basins clean and pick up any debris.”

All of Terrebonne’s floodgates had been closed as of Friday afternoon, including the largest, the Bubba Dove Floodgate in the Houma Navigation Canal.

“The good news is yesterday, when we closed the Bubba Dove floodgate, we were able to close it at a low tide, which gives us a lot of reservoir capacity for this rain,” Terrebonne Levee Director Reggie Dupre said Friday. “So Mother Nature cooperated a little bit for us. The biggest concern will be rain and a little bit of tidal surge.”

All of Lafourche’s pumping stations were up and running, but Parish President Jimmy Cantrelle cautioned that large amounts of rain in a short period could overwhelm them.

“If we have a deluge like 6 or 7 inches of rain in an hour, there’s no pumping system in south Louisiana that can handle that,” Cantrelle said.

A mandatory evacuation was issued Thursday for Port Fourchon and other areas south of the Leon Theriot Lock in Golden Meadow. The Raceland Recreation Center, at 241 Recreation Drive, is open for residents who need a place to stay.

Cantrelle urged residents to stay off the roads as the storm approaches.

“The conditions are deteriorating,” Cantrelle said. “I want to tell anybody who has a restaurant open in Lafourche that if the weather keeps deteriorating I would close after lunch. If you have any plans or functions taking place this weekend, please postpone them because we don’t want people on the roads when they’re unsafe.”

Officials expressed concern that floodwaters will make La. 1 in south Lafourche, the only road to and from the Gulf island community of about 1,500 permanent residents, impassable.

“We’re asking everyone there to leave because if something happens we won’t be able to get to you in a couple of days,” Cantrelle said. “Please leave now if you can. Use common sense and be safe.”

Lafourche Sheriff Craig Webre urged residents to stock up on essential supplies like food, water, flashlights and batteries and keep off the roads. The sheriff also cautioned people to be wary of false rumors circulating on social media.

“Make decisions based on accurate information,” Webre said. “For the positive aspects associated with social media in terms of sharing information there is also the risk associated with wrong information.”

The most vulnerable flooding risks are areas south of the floodgates, and street flooding will be monitored on a case-by-case basis, Webre said.

“As long as the pumps and levees work as they’re supposed to, we think we’ll be OK,” the sheriff said. “If we get 10 inches of rain in an hour, all bets are off.”

Grand Isle residents like Shelly Jambon have been under a mandatory evacuation order since Thursday due to concerns of floodwaters inundating the area.

“We’re just here hanging out to make sure the generator kicks on,” Jambon, who owns the Sureway Supermarket in Grand Isle, said Friday. “We’re starting to get a few wind gusts and we had a little flicker of light a few minutes ago. We’re used to it. If and when water does come in it’s going to go right back out. The Town

Council has gotten us pumps, so as long as those things run we'll be OK for the most part. But then again Mother Nature is the one woman I'll definitely not go up against. She wins every time."

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