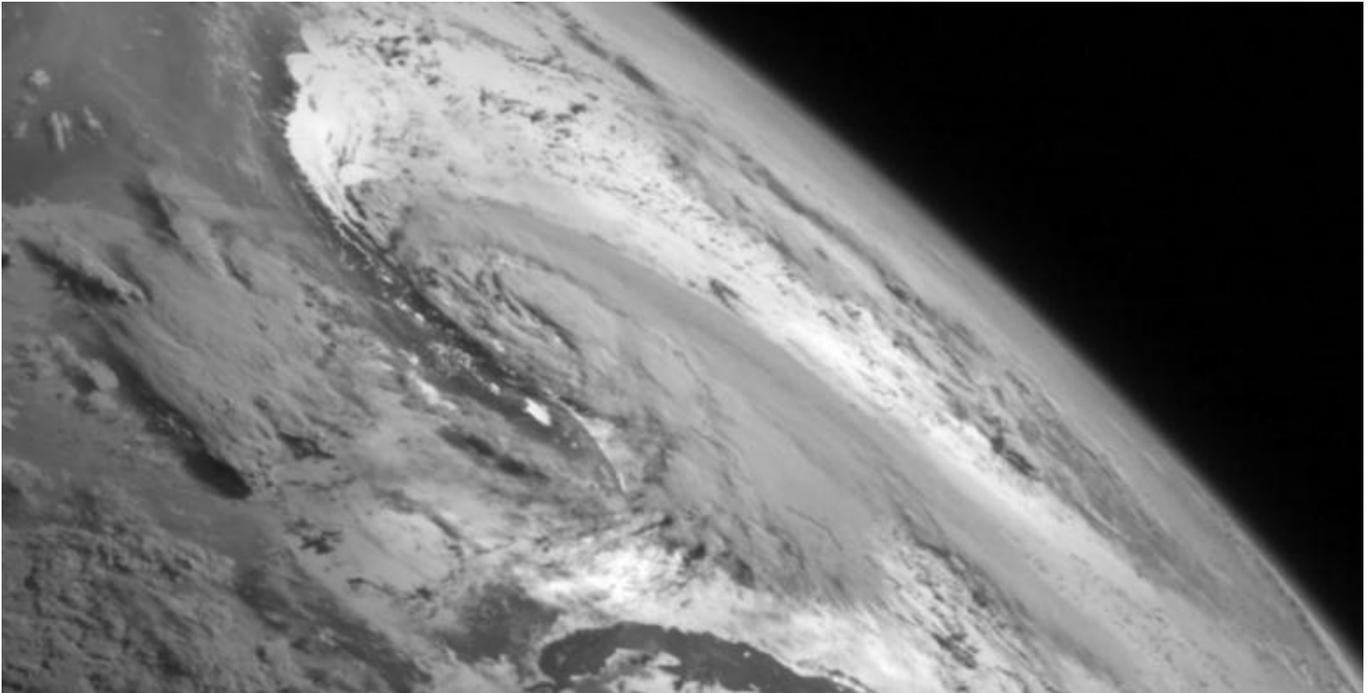


Arthur becomes first hurricane of 2014 Atlantic season

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Arthur was about 190 miles (305 km) south-southwest of Cape Fear, North Carolina with maximum sustained winds of 75 mph (120 kph), the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) said after upgrading its status.

It was moving at 9 miles per hour (15 kph) in a northerly direction toward the coast and is expected to turn toward the northeast with an increase in speed on Thursday.

Authorities had on Wednesday begun closing campgrounds, lighthouses and beaches on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Several towns and villages rescheduled Independence Day festivities and fireworks plans as the storm picked up speed.

North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory declared a state of emergency on Wednesday for 25 eastern counties to help prepare for possible damage.

Local businesses were worried about losses, though computer forecast models showed the hurricane was not a threat to key oil and gas producing areas in the Gulf of Mexico.



Tourists stand underneath the Brooklyn Bridge to photograph a summer storm bearing down on New York ...

Arthur could be packing Category 1 hurricane-force winds of 85 mph (135 kph) when the outer bands brush the Carolinas on Thursday and Friday before weakening, forecasters said.

The storm could also cause dangerous rip currents, rainfall, fierce winds, and flooding along coastal areas of Southern states.

Farther up the coast, the resort town of Ocean City, Maryland, said it was moving its July 4 fireworks display to Saturday because of the storm.

Boston officials also delayed a nationally televised concert by the Boston Pops and a fireworks display, which draw hundreds of thousands of spectators to the city's riverfront.

A tropical storm becomes a hurricane when maximum sustained winds reach 74 mph (119 kph).

(Reporting by Anupam Chatterjee in Bangalore and Eric M. Johnson in Seattle; Editing by Alison Williams and John Stonestreet and Sofina Mirza-Reid)

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