

Cleanup continues following hurricane

By Candy Hatcher
Staff Writer

Cleanup crews in New Hanover and Brunswick counties were out in full force Sunday, moving fallen trees and patching roofs.

It was the third full day of such work in the aftermath of Hurricane Diana, which caused an estimated \$70 million in damage to the two counties and crops inland.

Although Friday and Saturday had been perfect beach days and a few people succumbed to the temptation of improving their tans, Sunday was a crisp fall day, with a high of 67 degrees.

The cold front that moved into Southeastern North Carolina late Saturday night had nothing to do with the hurricane, a National Weather Service spokesman said.

The quick change brought a different kind of danger, however. A weather service spokesman reported hail in Bladen, Brunswick, Sampson, Duplin, Onslow and Carteret counties Saturday night, and

marine warnings were in effect from Shallotte Inlet to Carolina Beach.

In Shallotte, the spokesman said, there were reports of hail and severe lightning. West of Jacksonville on N.C. 53, the weather service said, the wind uprooted a tree, and in the south part of the city, it broke windows.

Wallace received penny-sized hail, and an area 8 miles north of Morehead City reported "golf-ball-sized hail," the spokesman said.

Temperatures were expected to reach 70 degrees today and the mid-70s by Tuesday. Winds are expected to be between 5 and 10 mph, although gusts as high as 30 mph were measured in Wilmington Sunday, according to the weather service.

The cold front was off the south Georgia and north Florida coast Sunday night, the service said, and a slow warming trend was expected later this week.

The latest weather change was not expected to hamper utility

workers trying to restore power to homes and businesses.

By Sunday night, Carolina Power & Light Co. reported only 100 customers in New Hanover, Brunswick and Pender counties without power. Places without power included scattered areas in Carolina Beach, Wilmington Beach, Kure Beach, Masonboro Sound, Myrtle Grove Sound and Greenville Sound, said District Manager Fred Daye.

Every customer who could receive power at his home should have gotten it by midnight Sunday, he said.

In Long Beach, police dispatcher Jackie Lee said everything was "pretty much" back to normal Sunday night. Property owners are hard at work on their homes, and disaster crews have left, she said. At least two dead porpoises were on the shore at Long Beach Saturday. They apparently were too close to the surface during the height of the storm.

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Staff photo by Gray Honeycutt

Jennifer Berting of Wilmington and her mom, Kathy, brace themselves against the cold Sunday. For more on the weather, please see page 2A.

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Storm

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Long Beach damage is estimated at \$4 million to \$5 million, said Mayor Ben Thomas. He said an \$18.5 million figure he released earlier was an error.

"In all the hustle and bustle, somebody pushed the wrong buttons," he said.

Bald Head Island sustained very little damage from the hurricane, a Bald Head Island Limited spokesman said. There were broken windows, loss of shingles and water damage, said Catherine Burwell, but the water "never went over the dune line." She said there was no surge of ocean water and no structural damage.

In Wilmington, those with property damage were working on roofs and picking up fallen branches.

This week, city crews will haul off trees and limbs that fell on private property if the debris is dragged to the curb. City officials do not want the debris put in the street.

Wilmington police were warning residents that people claiming to represent out-of-town tree removal companies have been going door-to-door saying they are sponsored by the city, or have a contract with the city.

No out-of-town tree removal services have a contract with Wilmington, the city manager's office said, and it cannot vouch for the credibility of any tree removal service. The police ask residents approached by people making these claims to call the city's hotline, 343-3608, between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Wilmington Red Cross spokesman Jo Anne Jones said three storm

centers will open today in Wilmington, Carolina Beach and Southport to help victims of the hurricane who need food, clothing and housing. There are 3,545 families affected by the hurricane, she said, adding that the shelters, after serving about 5,000 people, have closed.

N.C. Insurance Commissioner John Ingram will tour storm-damaged areas Tuesday.

Ingram said he would place his Consumer Insurance Division staff in emergency headquarters where needed. He assigned staff members from his Fire and Rescue Division, who have coordinated some 1,300 volunteer fire units and rescue squads.

The commissioner said insurance firms had told him they would try to process citizens' claims quickly.

Damage from Hurricane Diana's 135-mph winds fell far short of original estimates.

Orrin H. Pilkey, a Duke University geology professor who had predicted serious problems for Carolina and Wrightsville beaches, said he was surprised at the lack of damage.

"It appeared to me from the air that damage was purely (from the winds)," he said. "The really damaging part of a hurricane we were lucky enough not to get (is) the storm surge."

Storm surge, a result of high winds and low barometric pressure, is the mound of ocean water that comes ashore when a hurricane's center strikes land.

Diana lost much of its punch when it dawdled for a day offshore.

The most important factor, though, may have been that the storm did not hit during high tide.

William J. Cleary, a professor of marine geology at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington who has been surveying damage, said



Staff photo by Les Gruber

Workers remove a big oak tree that crushed Bill Gibbs' car at 1309 Chestnut St., Wilmington.

Long Beach and Carolina Beach sustained the worst erosion.

On the average, Cleary said, 15 to 20 feet of berm vanished along Wrightsville and Carolina beaches.

"In some cases, there were 30 feet or more of beach areas wiped out, particularly near inlets," Cleary said.

Pilkey said he hoped the relatively smooth passage of Diana will not make coastal residents too optimistic about surviving the next storm.

"We're still waiting for the storm that will really come ashore with a storm surge," Pilkey said. "We're still waiting for the next Hazel, and the next Hazel will come, no question about that."

Diana's movements last week defied any precision that satellites, computers and aircraft have given to forecasters, leaving prediction of

the storm's direction as much to speculation as science, said Hal Gerrish, a specialist at the National Hurricane Center.

"Two problems bug us to death," Gerrish said. One is a storm that begins to intensify rapidly prior to landfall. The other is when the steering isn't very clear."

Diana challenged meteorologists with both of these situations.

Tuesday, after drifting for three days up the Atlantic coast, Diana still was a minimal hurricane with central winds swirling at about 90 mph. Then, as the storm appeared to veer at the Carolinas' coastline, it suddenly began to garner strength. Within 12 hours, Diana had become a 135-mph monster.

But then, even as worried forecasters began urging evacuations, Diana suddenly stopped.

For the next 24 hours, Diana circled, keeping its most devastating winds offshore, confounding forecasters and exasperating coastal evacuees.

When Diana finally headed toward North Carolina, coastal residents only had hours of notice.

But compared with other hurricanes, Diana's destruction appeared to be minor — with an estimated \$70 million in damage and at least three people dead in accidents during the storm — and confined to a small coastal area around Wilmington.

That left some people grumbling about forecasters "crying wolf," Gerrish said.

"We have to err on the conservative side," he said of the center's hourly warnings of potential flooding and wind damage.