



January hurricane forms in Atlantic for first time since 1938

Hurricane Alex develops near Azores in water barely warm enough for any storm to form, say US researchers

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A hurricane has formed far out in the Atlantic Ocean, the first time such an event has happened in January since 1938, US officials said.

Hurricane Alex's maximum sustained winds were near 85mph (140kmh) and residents of Portugal's mid-Atlantic Azores islands were warned to expect waves up to 60ft (18 metres) high and wind gusts up to 100mph.

The islands' Civil Protection Service issued a weather red alert, the highest of four warnings that indicates extreme risk, for five of the archipelago's nine islands.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) in Miami said in a Facebook post there hadn't been a hurricane present during the month of January since 1955, when Alice formed in late December

1954 and continued into the next month.

The hurricane was centred about 350 miles south of Faial Island in the central Azores and was moving north-north-east at about 22mph. Alex was expected to move near or over parts of the Azores on Friday, the NHC said.

The Azores government on Thursday advised kindergartens to stay closed and told residents to ensure drainage systems were not blocked.

The archipelago, which has a population of about 250,000, has been threatened by hurricanes before, but they usually lose their strength as they move into colder northern water.

Alex formed only days after a rare event in the Pacific. An El Niño-related tropical storm formed south-west of Hawaii last week. Tropical Storm Pali, only the third such system to develop in January in more than 40 years, had weakened to a depression by Thursday and was expected to dissipate in the next day or so. It never made landfall.

Alex's formation, however, had nothing to do with El Niño, said Mike Halpert, the deputy director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center in the US.

The NOAA researcher Jim Kossin said the water in which Alex formed was about 1.7C to 2.2C (3F to 4F) warmer than normal, but still barely warm enough for a storm to form.

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