



Image credit: NASA

Hurricane Florence

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When this image was captured by Astronaut Ricky Arnold on September 10, 2018, Florence was still four days from land-fall. Seen here at the peak of its intensity, the storm weakened gradually as it approached the Carolina coast. By the time it came ashore at Wrightsville Beach, NC, the wind speeds within the storm had dropped from Category 4 to Category 1 levels. That's the good news.

The bad news? When it comes to hurricanes, wind is only part of the problem. Once over land Florence progressed at a leisurely pace of 3 mph. Four days and 11 trillion gallons of water later, the Carolinas were swamped. Flash floods and rising rivers rendered some areas uninhabitable. At least 34 lives were lost across the three most heavily-impacted states.

Harvey, Maria, Irma, Florence, Michael - few scientists doubt what is powering these colossal storms. Heat trapped in our atmosphere by greenhouse gases (primarily CO₂) is absorbed by the oceans; as the CO₂ levels increase so does the average Sea Surface Temperature - by about 0.13°F per decade in fact (data source: NOAA 2016).

Warmer waters generate more, larger, and ever more destructive storms. If the current trend continues we can expect annual visits from Florence and her kind.

