

Storm Eunice batters Europe killing at least eight people

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London, February 19 (RHC)-- An Atlantic storm has battered Northwestern Europe with record winds of up to 196km (122 miles) per hour, killing at least eight people, knocking out power for tens of thousands,

and shredding the roof of London's O2 Arena.

Storm Eunice hit western England and made landfall in Cornwall on Friday where waves lashed the coast, sending plumes of spray dozens of metres into the air.

A woman was killed in London when a car she was travelling in was crushed by a tree and a man in a vehicle in Liverpool died due to flying debris. Another man died after a vehicle collided with a fallen tree in the southern English county of Hampshire.

In the Netherlands, three people were killed by toppled trees. In Belgium, strong winds brought a crane down onto the roof of a hospital, and a British man died after being blown from his boat into the water. Another man died in Ireland after being struck by a falling tree while clearing storm debris, RTE reported.

Strong winds in London shredded the white-domed roof of the O2 arena that has hosted stars from The Rolling Stones to Beyonce and Rihanna. Tall buildings in London trembled as wind whistled through Canary Wharf.

In Wales, waves crashed over Aberystwyth promenade, some as high as houses. More than 100,000 people were hit by power cuts as lines were torn down and ancient trees keeled over.

"Storm Eunice is really packing a punch," Met Office Chief Meteorologist Frank Saunders said. "We only issue red weather warnings when we think there is a threat to life from the weather." The Met Office said a gust of 196kmph (122mph) was recorded at The Needles on the Isle of Wight, provisionally a record for the most powerful gust ever recorded in England.

Later on Friday, the Met Office said the fiercest winds from the storm were heading towards Scandinavia and northern mainland Europe where warnings were issued.

Planes were buffeted so strongly by gusts at some British airports that pilots were forced to abandon landings. A livestream of Heathrow Airport's runway was being watched by more than 200,000 people online. A total of 436 flights were cancelled across the United Kingdom amid record winds from Storm Eunice, according to Cirium data.

At the Tan Hill Inn, Britain's highest pub in Yorkshire, staff were busy preparing even if the winds remained merely blustery in the region of northern England. "But with the snow coming in now, the wind's increasing, we're battening down the hatches, getting ready for a bad day and worse night," pub maintenance worker Angus Leslie said.

Environment Agency official Roy Stokes warned weather watchers and amateur photographers against heading to Britain's southern coastline in search of dramatic footage, calling it "probably the most stupid thing you can do".

Scientists said the Atlantic storm's tail could pack a "sting jet" – a rarely seen meteorological phenomenon that brought havoc to Britain and northern France in the Great Storm of 1987.

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