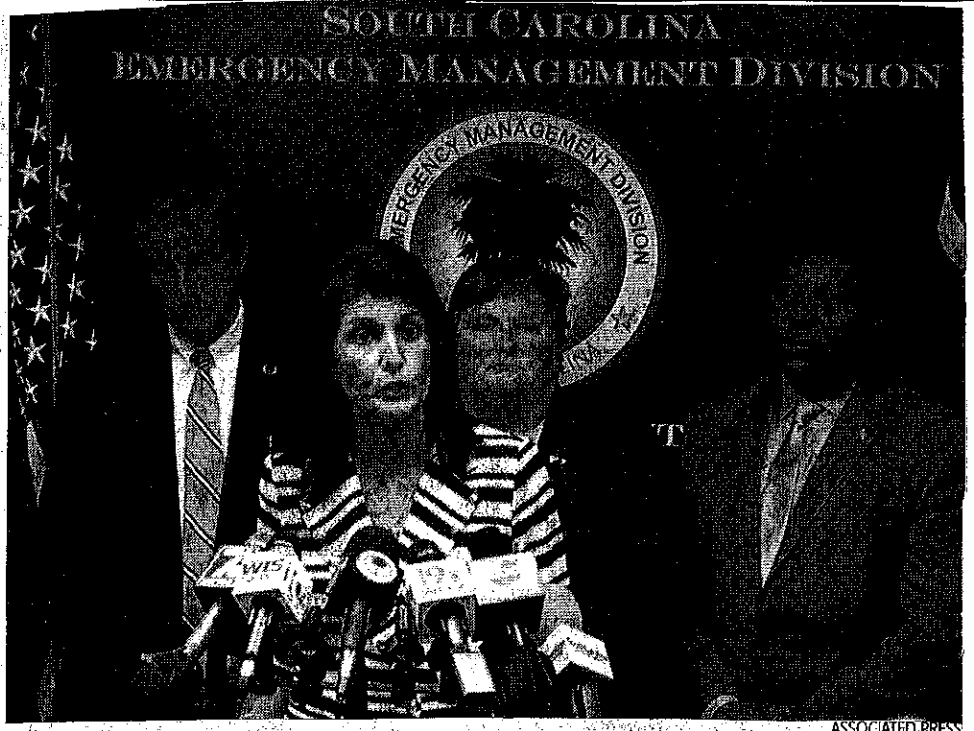


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Gov. Nikki Haley announces that she plans to call for the evacuation of about 1 million people from South Carolina's coast as Hurricane Matthew threatens on Tuesday at the South Carolina Emergency Management Division headquarters in Pine Ridge.

Hurricane could see 1M evacuated from SC coast

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA — South Carolina authorities are preparing to evacuate more than 1 million people — or about a quarter of the state's population — from low-lying coastal areas as Hurricane Matthew threatens.

If the forecast doesn't change before Wednesday morning, Gov. Nikki Haley said she will begin the massive evacuation effort that involves 3,700 law officers and reversing lanes to allow drivers on the wrong side of about a dozen highways at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

Currently there are no hurricane watches or warnings for the South Carolina coast, and conditions aren't expected to begin deteriorating until late morning or early afternoon Friday in the southernmost parts of the state. But Haley said the state needs to start well in advance so the evacuation can be orderly and comfortable.

"The key is we want to be safe, but we want to make sure it is not a frustrating situation for people," Haley said at a Tuesday news conference.

It is the first massive evacuation in South Carolina since Hurricane Floyd brushed the state in 1999. The governor then did not reverse lanes on Interstate 26, and a typical two-hour ride turned into a 24-hour nightmare.

The state Climatology Office says a hurricane has not made landfall in South Carolina since Gaston moved ashore north of Charleston in August 2004. Matthew is forecast to hit the state as a Category 2 or 3 storm — the strongest since Hugo slammed into Charleston in 1989.

Schools are closing for the rest of the week in the southern and eastern half of the state so they can be turned into shelters, and government offices are closing in those same counties to pull traffic off roads needed as evacuation routes.

The evacuation order will likely include all of Beaufort County and Jasper County east of Interstate 95, most of Charleston, North Charleston and the barrier islands and suburbs east and west of the cities, and areas near and east of U.S. Highway 17 in Georgetown and Horry counties. The exact areas will be detailed in the evacuation order and found online at the South Carolina Emergency Management Division's website.

Greenville County is sending more than 350 school buses to Charleston County to evacuate people without a car. State agencies were arranging evacuations of people with special medical needs, Haley said.