

Bahamas-bound storm Noel strengthens

by UPI

MIAMI -- Slow-moving Tropical Storm Noel soaked Cuba and gathered strength Wednesday as it headed toward the Bahamas. Forecasters at the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said at 11 a.m., Noel's sustained winds had risen to 50 mph with higher gusts as the storm moved off mainland Cuba. Strengthening over the next 24 hours was likely, the report said. Noel's center was about 175 miles south-southwest of Nassau moving to the north-northwest at 8 mph. The storm is blamed for as many as 30 deaths in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. No immediate word of injuries or damage were available from Cuba. Noel's effects were being felt as far north as Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where beaches flew rough surf and rip tide warning flags, the Miami Herald said. "Interests in southern Florida should closely monitor the progress of Noel," forecasters said, as tropical storm-force winds extend up to 115 miles, mainly to the north and east of the center. AccuWeather forecasters said Noel was expected to move through the northwestern Bahamas Thursday and by then, seas would also be rough offshore of Georgia and the Carolinas.

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