NOAA Technical Memorandum NOS OES

EFFECTS OF THE JANUARY 1992 ATLANTIC OCEAN COASTAL STORM ON WATER LEVELS

DATA REPORT



MAY 1992

OCEAN AND LAKE LEVELS DIVISION OFFICE OF OCEAN AND EARTH SCIENCES NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852

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2. Tide Station Location Chartlets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Stephen K. Gill and Dale H. Deitemyer, Tidal Analysis Branch, Ocean and Lake Levels Division. It represents the cumulative efforts of Atlantic Operations Section personnel stationed in Chesapeake, VA, and headquarters personnel of the Ocean and Lake Levels Division located in Rockville, MD, who are responsible for operating and maintaining the tide stations, and for the priority collection, processing and analysis of data and information.

EFFECTS OF JANUARY 1992 ATLANTIC OCEAN

COASTAL STORM ON WATER LEVELS

DATA REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

This report documents the water levels observed during the formation and decay of the early January 1992 coastal storm that severely affected the coastal areas of Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey.

The Ocean and Lake Levels Division (OLLD), Office of Ocean and Earth Sciences (OES), National Ocean Service (NOS) operates and maintains water level measurement stations; collects, processes, and analyzes data; and produces standard time series and water level datum products. The OLLD operates the National Water Level Observation Network (NWLON), a network of approximately 200 long-term continuously operating stations in the U.S. coastal ocean, territories, and possessions, including the Great Lakes and their connecting channels and also installs, operates and maintains short term water level stations for various special projects for other federal and state agencies.

This report contains information from selected NWLON stations and special project stations in operation during the January 1992 coastal storm. The maximum water level heights recorded during the storm are reported and compared to the maximum historical water level heights observed over the period of record at each location. Storm surge, as defined in this report, is the difference between observed and predicted water level heights. Predicted water levels are computed using standard NOS harmonic analysis and tide prediction algorithms. The comparisons between predicted and observed water levels are presented in a set of time series plots. Characteristics of the response of water levels to the storm at each location are shown in this report as time series plots of the storm surge.

This storm had especially devastating effects on the open ocean coasts of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey. The center of the northward moving storm turned north-westward and made landfall on the Maryland and Delaware ocean coast on January 4, 1992. The water level measurement stations suffered varying degrees of damage during this particular storm from the high water levels and the high waves. The Ocean City tide station was completely destroyed when the offshore end of the Ocean City Pier on which it was located was destroyed. Other nearby stations had relatively minor damage.

Appendix 1 includes a copy of the National Weather Service (NWS) Weekly Series of Daily Weather Maps (January 2 through January 5, 1992) showing the daily progression of the storm event and includes a plot of the wind speed, wind gust and barometric pressure as recorded by the ancillary sensors at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel tide station. Appendix 2 is a set of station location chartlets for each station listed.

II. MAXIMUM HEIGHTS AND DATUM RELATIONSHIPS

Table I includes the following information for the storm: the date, time and height of the maximum water level heights above Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW), Mean Higher High Water (MHHW), and National Geodetic Vertical Datum (NGVD); the date and height of the maximum historical water level heights above MLLW; and the Mean Great Diurnal Range (GT). The MLLW and MHHW datums are based on the 1960-78 National Tidal Datum Epoch. MLLW is the reference datum in tidal areas for NOAA nautical charts and the NOS published tide prediction tables.

The tides in this study area are classified semidiurnal; i.e two high waters and two low waters each tidal day. Although the inequality in the heights of the two high waters each tidal day and the inequality in the heights of the two low waters each tidal day are small, they can be significant in terms of storm surge (e.g., if the maximum storm surge coincides with a higher high water or a lower high water). The diurnal high water and diurnal low water inequalities in the study area range from 0.10 to 0.40 foot. The MHHW datum is the average of the higher high water heights observed each tidal day and MLLW is the average of the lower low water heights observed each tidal day. The mean Great Diurnal Range is the difference in height between MHHW and MLLW. Height comparisons to MHHW and the mean Diurnal Range of tide are provided to put the effects of this particular storm in context with the normal excursion of the

tide from MLLW up to MHHW at each location.

The maximum historical values are based on the entire period of record for each location. These periods are quite different for each station. The maximum historical observed water height was exceeded at only one location (Wachapreague, VA). However, this station has a relatively short historical record of 13 years. The maximum heights during the storm were within 0.50 foot of the historical maximums at several of the longer operating stations (Lewes, DE (72 yrs.); Cape May, NJ (26 yrs.); and Lewisetta, VA (21 yrs.)).

TABLE I.MAXIMUM OBSERVED WATER LEVEL HEIGHTS
AND HISTORICAL DATA COMPARISON

STATION	DATE/TIME (mon/day)	OBSERVED HIGHEST HEIGHT ABOVE MLLW MHHW NGVD			HISTORICAL HEIGHT ABOVE MLLW DATE HGT. (mon/yr)		DIURNAL RANGE	
The Battery, NY	1/4 0812	7.09	1.97	5.21	9/60	10.23	5.12	
Sandy Hook, NJ	1/4 0730	7.48	2.28	5.71	3/62	10.33	5.20	
Atlantic City, NJ	1/4 0730	7.18	2.50	5.54	9/44	9.20	4.68	
Cape May, NJ	1/4 0806	8.82	3.31	6.82	9/85	9.09	5.51	
Philadelphia, PA	1/4 1354	8.58	1.83	6.29	11/50	10.79	6.75	
Lewes, DE	1/4 0748	9.02	4.29	7.30	3/62	9.49	4.73	
Ocean City, MD	station destroyed				9/85	7.54	3.96	
Baltimore, MD	1/4 2000	3.19	1.53	2.91	8/33	7.93	1.66	
Annapolis, MD	1/4 1836	2.74	1.31	2.58	8/33	6.40	1.43	
Solomons Is., MD	1/4 1112	3.44	1.93	3.09	8/55	4.53	1.51	
Wachapreague, VA	1/4 0742	8.95	4.35	-	10/80	8.33	4.60	
Kiptopeake, VA	1/4 0836	5.80	2.77	4.37	3/62	7.41	3.03	
Colonial Beach, VA	1/4 1430	3.99	2.02	3.51	9/79	4.36	1.97	
Lewisetta, VA	1/4 1218	3.50	1.97	3.22	3/83	3.62	1.53	
Hampton Roads, VA	1/4 0900	5.31	2.51	4.14	8/33	8.39	2.80	
Ches. Bay Brdg. Tun., VA	1/4 0618	5.59	2.64	-	4/78	6.36	2.95	
Duck Pier, NC	1/4 0624	5.68	1.92	4.10	11/81	6.48	3.76	
Cape Hatteras, NC	1/4 0712	5.09	1.56	3.73	9/85	5.84	3.53	

NOTES:

Heights are in feet; Times are in EST.

III. COMPARISON PLOTS: OBSERVED VS. PREDICTED

This section presents plots of the observed and predicted hourly height time series for each station from which the storm surge signatures in Section IV were derived. The effects of the timing and magnitude of the storm on the observed water levels are clearly seen when compared to the predicted water level. The reference datum and time zone are shown on each plot. EST is Eastern Standard Time; UTC is Universal Time Coordinates; and GMT is Greenwich Mean Time.

In most tidal areas, the maximum height is strongly tied to the timing of the storm relative to the phases of the tide. Storms that coincide with perigee and/or syzygy (new or full moon) will tend to have more devastating effects. This storm did occur around the time of the new moon (January 4), however the effects of stronger tide producing forces due to the new moon were partially mitigated by the phasing with apogee of the moon (moon furthest away in the monthly elliptical orbit) on January 6. The maximum storm surge effects coincided with the mid-day high tide on January 4.





















IV. STORM SURGE CHARACTERISTICS

Information on the maximum storm surge measured at each station is found in Table II. Storm surge is defined as the difference between the observed and predicted water level heights. Predicted water level heights are computed using standard NOS harmonic analysis and prediction algorithms. The timing of the maximum storm surge is largely dependent upon the timing of interaction of the tide and the storm passage, and the maximum storm surge may not coincide with the occurrence of a predicted tidal high water. Table II provides the following information for each station: the date and time of the maximum storm surge; the observed height of the water above MLLW at that time; the predicted height of the water above MLLW at that time; and the storm surge value (observed minus predicted heights).

Time series of the storm surge are constructed by subtracting the predicted time series from the observed time series. Figures 1 through 4 are simultaneous plots of the storm surge for various geographical regions for a nine-day time period centered around the time period of the storm. All of the figures use the same vertical scale (in feet) so that the magnitude of the surge can be put into perspective between stations and regions. Table II and the figures show that storm surge values over 4.50 feet occurred at Lewes, DE and Wachapreague, VA; locations closest to the storm center as it made landfall. Storm surge above 3.00 feet were observed at all coastal stations locations in southern Chesapeake Bay and along the Atlantic Coasts from Virginia up to New Jersey and New York Harbor.

Storm surge plots of the closest stations to the landfall of the storm depict signatures similar to those found during hurricane events (Figure 1). The signatures show a pronounced sharp peak at the time of landfall superimposed on a lower frequency surge. Figure 2 shows the significant effects of the storm in Upper and Lower New York Harbor as well as the effects in the upper Delaware Bay system as seen at Philadelphia. The storm surge maxima at the stations in the upper Chesapeake Bay showed varying responses to the changing wind and pressure fields as the storm passed. Figure 4 shows the decreasing effects of the storm proceeding south along the coast from the Chesapeake Bay entrance.

The storm surge plots for many of the stations show some degree of periodicity at the tidal frequencies. This is attributed to the process of the subtraction of two sinusoidal curves (predicted and observed) that are slightly out of phase because of the storm, and to the effect of the prolonged storm surge in modifying the normal sinusoidal shape of the observed tide curve. An extreme example of the residual periodicity is found at Philadelphia. Philadelphia normally has a complex tide curve due to the shallow water and frictional effects, and the addition of the timing of the storm surge and the tide causes significant time-varying changes in the frictional drag incurred. There was no smoothing of observed data prior to computing the storm surge values for plotting in Figures 1 through 4.

Figures 5 and 6 show the results of applying a filter to smooth the storm surge plots so that the low frequency signature can be resolved through the high frequency noise. A low-pass 13-hour Doodson filter was applied to the hourly storm surge data to produce the plots in Figure 5. Doodson's filters were developed for smoothing the tidal components from hourly records. The 13-hour filter window length is appropriate for studying the longer term storm surge oscillations

before and after landfall, but is too long of a window for studying the maximum storm effects because the narrow (short term) storm surge peaks are filtered out. Filtering is especially beneficial in studying storm surge effects when working with residuals such as those found at Philadelphia.

The storm surge plots are generally consistent with the meteorological information found in the appendices. The NWS maps show that there were actually a series of offshore low pressure centers during this time period, with one of the most intense centers moving westward and making landfall on January 4. The storm surge plots generally show a secondary oscillation after the main storm surge event that are consistent with the secondary increase in wind speed at Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel on January 5. The storm surge plots of the upper Chesapeake Bay stations found in Figure 3 show a significant anomaly from the others with a significant decrease in the surge prior to the maximum surge. This is probably in response to the shift in direction of the strong winds as the main storm center passed inland up the Delaware Bay.

TABLE II. MAXIMUM STORM SURGE INFORMATION

STATION	DAT (mon/day	E/TIME hrs.min.)	HEIGHT ABOVE OBSERVED	E MLLW PREDICTED	DIFFERENCE
The Battery, NY	1/4	1012	6.66	3.19	3.47
Sandy Hook, NJ	1/4	1012	6.35	2.65	3.70
Atlantic City, NJ	1/4	0730	7.38	4.02	3.36
Cape May, NJ	1/4	0900	8.77	5.06	3.71
Philadelphia, PA	1/4	1442	8.24	5.55	2.69
Lewes, DE	1/4	0748	9.19	4.62	4.57
Ocean City, MD	static	on destroyed			
Baltimore, MD	1/5	0048	2.44	0.14	2.30
Annapolis, MD	1/4	2254	2.29	0.04	2.25
Solomons Is., MD	1/4	1100	3.41	0.46	2.95
Wachapreague, VA	1/4	0742	8.99	4.25	4.74
Kiptopeake, VA	1/4	0606	5.47	2.61	2.86
Colonial Beach, VA	1/4	1430	3.99	1.35	2.64
Lewisetta, VA	1/4	1148	3.45	0.67	2.78
Hampton Roads, VA	1/4	0600	4.90	1.41	3.49
Ches. Bay Brdg. Tun.,	VA 1/4	0506	5.21	1.67	3.54
Duck Pier, NC	1/4	0430	4.89	2.43	2.46
Cape Hatteras, NC	1/3	1900	4.44	2.14	2.30

NOTES:

Storm surge is the difference between observed and predicted heights; Heights are in feet; MLLW is Mean Lower Low Water datum; Times are in EST

FIGURE 1. STORM SURGE PLOTS, JANUARY 1992 STORM ATLANTIC CITY TO CHESAPEAKE BAY ENTRANCE

FIGURE 2. STORM SURGE PLOTS, JANUARY 1992 COASTAL STORM NEW YORK HARBOR TO DELAWARE BAY

FIGURE 3. STORM SURGE PLOTS, JANUARY 1992 COASTAL STORM UPPER CHESAPEAKE BAY

FIGURE 5. COMPARISON OF HOURLY STORM SURGE WITH DOODSON FILTERED STORM SURGE USING 13-HOUR WINDOW

FIGURE 6. COMPARISON OF HOURLY STORM SURGE AND DOODSON FILTERED STORM SURGE USING 13-HOUR WINDOW

V. SUMMARY

The continuous operation of the National Water Level Observation Network (NWLON) has resulted in an important data set documenting the effects of an unusual coastal storm on water levels in the U.S. coastal ocean. Although not a hurricane, this storm was a significant storm event in the history of the Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey coastal zone.

Maximum recorded historical highest water levels were exceeded at one of the NWLON stations (Wachapreague, VA). Although historical levels were not exceeded at the stations with the longer historical records, the maximum levels did come within 0.50 foot of the historical maxima at several locations (Lewes, DE; Cape May, NJ; and Lewisetta, VA). The maximum storm surge values (observed minus predicted water levels) of over 4.5 feet were also measured at Lewes and Cape May with several stations having values over 3.0 feet. Significant storm surge values were observed at NWLON stations as far south as Cape Hatteras, NC. The storm destroyed the NOAA tide station when the offshore end of the Ocean City Pier was destroyed.

Storm surge signatures derived from subtracting predicted from observed water levels generally show a steep rise to the maximum surge early on January 4, with a slower fall and evidence of a secondary oscillation at several locations. Notable exceptions are the storm surge signatures in the upper Chesapeake Bay, which exhibit a strong oscillation prior to the maximum surge due to shifts in wind direction as the storm center passed to the north. A 13-hour Doodson filter can be used to effectively smooth the high frequency noise found in the signatures.

Preliminary data recorded during the storm were provided to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service, and to FEMA. Information on tidal datums, storm surge, and time series from the stations listed in this report and from other NOS stations can be obtained from:

NOAA/National Ocean Service Office of Ocean and Earth Sciences Ocean and Lake Levels Division Products and Services Branch, N/OES23 6001 Executive Blvd. Rockville, MD 20852

Telephone: (301) 443-8467 FAX: (301) 443-1920

VI. APPENDICES

- 1. Storm Track Information from National Weather Daily Weather Maps Weekly Series and Ancillary Wind Measurements from the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel tide station.
- 2. Set of tide station location chartlets.

APPENDIX 1

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration • National Weather Service • National Meteorological Center Meteorological Operations Division & Climate Analysis Center

daily weather maps

Weekly Series DECEMBER 30, 1991 - JANUARY 5, 1992

The charts in this publication are the principal charts of the former Weather Bureau publication, "Daily Weather Map." They are the Surface Weather Map, the 500-Millibar Height Contours chart, the Highest and Lowest Temperatures chart, and the Precipitation Areas and Amounts chart. All charts for each day are arranged on a single page. They are derived from operational weather maps prepared by the National Meteorological Center, National Weather Service. The symbols on the Surface Weather Map and the 500-Millibar Height Contours chart are standard international symbols. Copies of an explanatory sheet are available from the Climate Analysis Center (address below). NOAA is responsible for managing, printing, and distributing these maps. The contents may be reprinted freely, with proper credit.

Orders for annual subscriptions and single copies may be sent to Daily Weather Maps, Climate Analysis Center, Room 808 World Weather Building, Washington, D.C. 20233. The price of the Daily Weather Maps is \$60 per year for domestic mailing, \$75 per year for foreign mailing and \$1.50 for single issues. Only checks or money orders (including international postal money orders), made payable to the Department of Commerce, NOAA, are acceptable.

The Surface Weather Map shows station data and the analysis for 7:00 a.m., EST, Tracks of well-defined low pressure areas are indicated by a chain of arrows; locations of these centers at 6, 12, and 18 hours preceding map time are indicated by small white crosses in black squares. Areas of precipitation are indicated by shading. The weather reports printed here are only a fraction of those on which the analyses are based. Occasional apparent discrepancies between the printed station data and the analyses result from the absence of station reports not included here because of lack of space.

The 500-Millibar Height Contours chart shows height contours and isotherms of the 500-millibar surface at 7:00 a.m., EST. Height contours are shown as continuous lines labeled in dekameters above sea level. Isotherms are shown as dashed lines labeled in degrees Celsius. Arrows show the wind direction and speed at the 500-millibar level.

The Highest and Lowest Temperature chart shows the maximum temperature for the 12-hour period ending 7:00 p.m. EST of the previous day and the minimum temperature for the 12hour period ending 7:00 a.m. EST. The names of the reporting points are shown on the Surface Weather Map. The maximum temperature is plotted above the station location, and the minimum temperature is plotted below.

The Precipitation Areas and Amounts chart shows areas (shaded) that had precipitation during the 24 hours ending at 7:00 a.m., EST, with amounts to the nearest hundredth of an inch. Incomplete totals are underlined. "T" indicates a trace of precipitation. Dashed lines, in season, show the depth of snow on the ground in inches at 7:00 a.m., EST.

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APPENDIX 2

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Mercator Projection Scale 1:80,000 at Lat. 37°40' North American 1927 Datum

SOUNDINGS IN FEET AT MEAN LOW WATER

	TIDAL INFORM	TIDAL INFORMATION				
	Mean High Water	Mean Tide Level	Mean Low Water			
	feet	feet	feet			
nlet	2.6	1.3	0.0			
	3.6	1.8	0.0			
	4.0	2.0	0.0			

HEIGHTS

Heights in feet above Mean High Water.

AUTHORITIES

ny and topography by the National Ocean Service. Geodetic Services with additional data from the Corps of ological Survey, and U.S. Coast Guard.

ols and Abbreviations see Chart No. 1 gulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 nes are shown thus: ---

ENTAL INFORMATION Coast Pilot 3 for Important

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STORM WARNINGS The National Weather Service displays storm warning at the following approximate locations Chincoteague C.G. Station (37*56'-75*22.8') (Daylight hours enly)

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