**Overview:**

Hurricane Isabel was the deadliest and costliest hurricane of the 2003 season, killing 51 people and incurring more than $5 billion in damages. Its immense size allowed it to wreak havoc across a large swath of the East Coast, especially Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The storm surge reached levels as high as 9.5 feet on rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay across Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and D.C. The National Weather Service (NWS) named it among the top most significant hurricanes to hit the region since the devastating Chesapeake-Potomac hurricane in 1933.

**Impact:**

Although the storm was well-predicted, major damage still occurred. Many cities were flooded, and some power outages lasted for weeks.

- Over $5 billion in damage
- Areas flooded up to 9.5 ft
- 15 million people lost power
- 17 direct deaths due to drowning, fallen trees, etc.
- 42 indirect deaths due to car crashes, power loss, cleanup activities, etc.
- States affected: FL, NJ, MD, PA, VA, RI, NC, D.C.

**Meteorology:**

On September 6, 1500 miles off the Senegalese coast, Isabel became the ninth of sixteen named tropical storms of the 2003 season. After quickly strengthening to a Category 5 (>155 mph winds), the storm remained above a Category 3 until the 16th.

**Quick Facts:**

- U.S. landfall date: September 18, 2003
- Max wind speed: 165 mph
- Category 5 duration: 36 hrs
- Minimum pressure: 915 mb
- Max total rainfall: 20.20 in

Landfall of the storm coincided with high tide, which increased the effects of the storm surge. This, along with rainfall deposited into the Chesapeake Bay watershed reaching 20 inches resulted in widespread, intense flooding.

**Saffir-Simpson Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Wind (mph)</th>
<th>Pressure (inches)</th>
<th>Surge (feet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74-95</td>
<td>&gt; 28.94</td>
<td>1 – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>96-110</td>
<td>28.93 – 24.58</td>
<td>3 – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>111-130</td>
<td>24.57 – 19.69</td>
<td>5 – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>131-155</td>
<td>19.55 – 13.15</td>
<td>7 – 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>≥ 156</td>
<td>≤ 12.46</td>
<td>&gt; 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**“The response to this hurricane has been really great. The planning for it has been great, the response during the hurricane was great, and the response after the hurricane has been great.”**

— Pres. George Bush

**“A bunch of houses pretty much lost everything. I’ve been through five hurricanes, but this is the first time I’ve seen houses destroyed.”**

— Floyd Bullock, Volunteer Firefighter