



June hurricanes rare but can form quickly

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Legal aid hotlines fielded questions about boat strikes



Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, center, has compared drug cartels to terrorist groups like al-Qaida and said the boat strikes act as a deterrent to drug traffickers. MARIA ALEJANDRA CARDONA/REUTERS FILE

Attacks have killed over 200 since September

Cybele Mayes-Osterman
USA TODAY

The U.S. military has killed more than 200 people in strikes on boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific in the last nine months in what legal experts and former military lawyers broadly agree constitute illegal military orders that service members should refuse to follow.

While there is no record of troops refusing to follow these orders, at least a handful of service members grappling

with these questions have sought legal advice, according to anonymous hotlines for U.S. military members.

Before the Trump-era boat strikes, the United States viewed the drug trade as a law enforcement issue and tasked the Coast Guard with interdicting boats trying to bring drugs into the country.

Since then, the Trump administration has released no evidence that any of the suspected narco-trafficking boats carried drugs or that their occupants worked for drug cartels. It has never identified the people it killed – just a

handful of names have been published in news reports. Family members also filed a federal lawsuit naming their relatives, whom they allege were murdered by the United States.

The military has published dozens of videos of the attacks on social media – grainy, black-and-white videos taken from above of boats speeding through the water before they explode into balls of flame.

And Trump officials continue to say the attacks are lawful. At a June 2 Senate budget hearing, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said every boat strike

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Fort Walton Beach man dies in crash

DeonTay Smith
Panama City News Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

A 60-year-old Fort Walton Beach man died and a 40-year-old man and an 11-year-old boy were seriously hurt in a crash on State Road 285. According to the Florida Highway Patrol, here's what we know:

When did the crash happen?

June 3, at approximately 3:43 p.m.

Where did the crash happen?

SR 285 at mile marker 10

What vehicles were involved in the crash?

2 SUVs.

Who was involved?

The driver of one SUV, a gray Chevy Trax, was a 60-year-old man from Fort Walton Beach. The driver of the other SUV, a gray Landrover, was a 40-year-old man from Fort Walton Beach. The passenger in the 40-year-old's vehicle was an 11-year-old boy. The patrol does not provide names in its news releases.

How did the crash happen?

According to the FHP press release,

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Florida's summer lightning season begins in a horrific way

Kimberly Miller
Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

Florida's first lightning-related death of the year happened on the rain-swollen Blackwater River as the atmosphere trembled and detonated, unleashing a thunderstorm that ended the life of an 18-year-old man.

Michael Aidan Vargas, who went by Aidan and was a passionate angler, was kayaking near the Panhandle town of Milton on May 31 when witnesses, in-

cluding Vargas' father, said they saw him get struck around noon and fall into the water. He didn't surface.

A desperate search of the current-tugged waterway began with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission taking the lead.

"I heard a very large lightning strike, so loud that it was ear piercing and scared me," said Steven Sanders, who said he was at the river near where the strike occurred. "Like 20 minutes go by and I see 10 to 15 cops walking the shore and some went by on a boat. They let us

know there was a lightning strike and didn't say much else."

Where does Florida rank in lightning deaths?

While raucous thunderstorms happen year-round in the Sunshine State, especially in the Panhandle where descending cold fronts are a more regular occurrence, summer is one of the more perilous seasons meteorologically.

Florida leads the nation in lightning deaths with 100 reported since 2006,

according to the National Lightning Safety Council. Last year, four people suffered lightning-related fatalities in Florida between June 14 and Sept 22. They died at the beach, while fishing, and on a hunting trip.

The year before, six people died in Florida after lightning strikes. All but one happened between June and mid-September as people sat under a tree in a park, swam at the beach and rode bikes through a neighborhood.

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