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Insurers Embrace US Supercomputer to Tackle Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico Hurricane Risk

- *Willis Supports Groundbreaking Programme by National Center for Atmospheric Research to Assist Energy and Property Insurance Markets -*

LONDON, UK October 29, 2008 – **The Willis Research Network** has teamed up with the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in undertaking the most detailed projections ever of future hurricane activity in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. With first results expected next spring, the programme seeks to help onshore and offshore underwriters confront the uncertainties climate change has brought over risk levels in recent years.

NCAR's premier models for weather and climate have been combined in a major simulation utilising the NCAR Bluefire supercomputer, operating at 76 trillion calculations per second, to assess changes in future location, frequency, wind severity and rainfall of hurricane tracks across this key region.

"It is clear from the impacts of recent hurricane activity that we urgently need to learn more about how hurricane intensity and behaviour may respond to a warming climate," said Professor Greg Holland, NCAR Project Leader and Willis Research Network member. "The increasingly dense development along our coastlines and our dependence on oil from the Gulf of Mexico leave our society dangerously vulnerable to hurricanes."

Dr James Done, Willis Research Fellow at NCAR and part of the project team added, "The project includes two strategic firsts for the hurricane modelling community. It will integrate global, Atlantic and local-scale models working at progressively higher resolutions. This allows us to link the detailed physics of local storms with the global influences that drive the necessary conditions for cyclone genesis and development.

"The second strategic step is to unify the weather forecasting and climate modelling communities within a single project and platform. It is very exciting and is the future of hurricane climate research."

The focus for Willis is to apply this work into the insurance industry quickly and practically.

"This programme offers significant advantage to those with Gulf of Mexico exposures," confirms Chris Clark, CEO Willis Re Specialty. "Our aim is a robust understanding of current and future risk levels and to provide critical input for improvements to the region's catastrophe models."

The project will also assist exposed insurers and communities throughout the Caribbean region.

"Our role has been to help frame the research programme to answer the questions our clients are asking. In the next phase, we will be helping to interpret the results and apply them in trading situations," said Tony Phillips, Managing Director, Willis Re Latin America in Miami. "The programme may also point to approaches for more accurate seasonal forecasts of hurricane activity across the Caribbean.

The project is supported by the National Science Foundation, NCAR's sponsor, The Research Partnership to Secure Energy for America, and through a long-term collaboration with the insurance industry via the Willis Research Network.

Full details of the announcement are available at:

<http://www.ucar.edu/news/releases/2008/hurricanemodel.jsp>

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The Willis Research Network (WRN) is the world's largest partnership between academia and the insurance industry. Willis has so far teamed up with fifteen leading institutions across a full range of disciplines from atmospheric science and climate statistics, to geography, hydrology and seismology, to the impacts on the environment via engineering, exposure analysis and Geographic Information Systems. Additional information can be found at www.willisresearchnetwork.com

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