

Extensive damage left in wake of historic South Carolina flood

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9 October 2015

Seventeen people are now confirmed dead in South Carolina as a result of the historic five-day rain storm that ended on Monday. In addition two people have died in North Carolina.

About two hundred households in South Carolina still have no electrical power and twenty-three shelters throughout the state are housing hundreds of people displaced by the storm. The University of South Carolina and many other schools will remain closed through today.

More than 250 roads and at least one hundred bridges remain closed, according to the South Carolina Emergency Management Division. A thirteen-mile stretch of Interstate 95, a key transportation artery, is closed between Exit 119 and 132. Some roads that are currently open are expected to be closed as floodwaters move downstream. The South Carolina National Guard estimates that the cost of rebuilding state roads could total hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars.

Floodwaters have largely cleared from the Midlands and are now flowing toward coastal areas. Residents in low lying areas along the Edisto and Santee rivers were urged by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to evacuate Thursday afternoon. The possibility of new dam breaches remains a concern in many areas.

The flooding has led to numerous water line breaks and sewage spills throughout the state, prompting boil water advisories in many counties.

Unprotected exposure to raw sewage in drinking water and the environment can lead to bacterial, viral and parasite infections. Contaminated water is of particular concern to individuals with lowered immunity, including small children, the elderly and people with HIV. South Carolina has the ninth highest rate of new HIV cases in the country each year, with more than 15,000 residents currently infected. Many of

these cases go untreated because poor patients cannot afford medical care.

The capital city of Columbia has a long tradition of negligence when it comes to preventing and cleaning up sewage spills. For at least a decade, the city of Columbia has routinely diverted tens of millions of dollars in water and sewer fees to other uses of the state budget, in spite of the fact that over a million gallons of sewage (1.6 million in 2014) are spilled in the city each year and much of the water and sewer infrastructure in Columbia is more than half a century old.

Last month, the state Supreme Court ruled that the practice of diverting funds constituted a violation of state budgetary statutes. "Simply put, the statutes do not allow these revenues to be treated as a slush fund," the court ruled.

According to estimates made in 2013, needed repairs and improvements to the city's water and sewer infrastructure would cost up to \$600 million. This figure could now be much higher, though the extent of the additional damage done by the storms to this already vulnerable infrastructure remains unclear.

While boil water advisories in many areas have already been lifted, authorities have warned Columbia residents that water advisories may remain in place for an indefinite period of time. Residents have been warned until further notice against using tap water to wash food, dishes or their hands and against using any appliances that might require drinkable water like dish washers, ice machines or drinking fountains.

Water quality concerns have also affected oyster and clam harvesters. Shellfish harvesting was banned in South Carolina's coastal waters just two days after the beginning of oyster season. "This has never happened in the state before. I'm guessing it'll be closed for at least a month," clammer David Belanger told the

Charleston City Paper. According to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, the ban will remain in effect until water sampling indicates that bacteria levels have gone back to normal.

Fish kills are expected to occur in the coming days as a result of the low-salinity conditions produced by the influx of rainwater.

Agriculture has also taken a hit from the storm. Peanut, cotton, kale, tomato, beet, carrot and collard green crops were all wiped out by the storm. Clemson Extension agent Zack Snipes told the *Post and Courier* that perennials such as pecans, peaches, blueberries and blackberries may also die as a result of the storm, since they cannot respire when the soil is saturated with water.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with volunteers at a water distribution center set up in Richland County. National Guard troops directed traffic into the parking lot of a large shopping center where pallets were stacked with bottled water. Volunteers loaded the water into the cars of those in need as they drove past.

“It’s been steady since before twelve o’clock,” Alysia Washington said of the row of cars making its way through the parking lot. The volunteers are working in shifts at the distribution center from 7:45am to 12pm and from 12pm to 6:30pm in order to get safe drinking water to residents.

“It’s supposed to go until the seventeenth,” she said. “The water’s all free. There’s been donations from all over, from Walmart and private donations. Parks and Rec are here. They’re the ones bringing the water over to the pallets here.”

Alysia expressed concern that conditions could still deteriorate in the area. “They’re still trying to fix a dam that could break. If that breaks, it could be 10 times worse.” Asked how long she thought it would take the area to recover, she said “Weeks. Months.”

Kristie, a school nurse in Lexington, South Carolina, and her daughter Haley, a middle school student, had also volunteered to help distribute water. “We were very lucky,” said Kristie, “Our area wasn’t affected. That’s why we decided to come out and help others.”

Haley explained that there was a lot of flooding around her school and like many students she did not know when classes would resume. She said, “I’ve seen pictures of people kayaking in front of my school.”

Kristie worried about the students and teachers at the school where she worked. “Several of our teachers and students have had damage,” she said. “Most of our students get free or reduced lunch. They get two meals a day at school. I know a lot of our kids are missing out on meals now. They need to be back at school to get fed.”

She was also concerned about the long-term effects of the storm. “I do think we’re going to see some lasting effects, especially with mold,” she said.



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