

A dozen dead, tens of thousands displaced as floods hit Germany and France

Our reporter
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Tens of thousands of people have been displaced by flooding that is hitting southeastern and northwestern Germany and central France, claiming between 12 and 18 lives, according to reports. It is feared that the death toll could climb higher.

With the Seine River having risen nearly 6.5 meters (21.3 feet) in Paris, officials are projecting that the river will crest this weekend, which would avert broader flooding of the city. Rain is forecast to continue through to the end of next week in central France, however.

The death toll was highest in Germany, where the states of Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate were both hit heavily by the floods. At least nine people have died in the flooding in Germany, and several people are still missing.

About 3,500 homes in Bavaria are without power after storm surges struck numerous towns, forcing authorities to send rescue helicopters to airlift people from the roofs of their homes. In the town of Simbach am Inn, three women in a same family were found drowned together, in the basement of their house. Lower Bavaria police spokesman Michael Emmer said the death toll could still rise.

The speed and intensity of the flooding took authorities by surprise, said Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann: “Within a few minutes, the water level rose several meters.”

African refugees joined people from nearby towns and Austrian firefighters who came to help German authorities and with rescue and clean-up operations in flood-stricken cities in Bavaria.

In Rhineland-Palatinate, the Ahr River rose nearly 13 feet to an unprecedented level, forcing a number of helicopter rescues of campers and hikers in the area and leaving thousands without power.

“The federal government is grieving for those who received help too late,” said German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

In France, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said an estimated 20,000 people have been evacuated as floods hit the centre of the country, notably the Loiret area, and the valleys of the Seine and Loire rivers.

At least three people were found dead in France, including one older man on horseback who was swept away by the floodwaters and drowned near Evry-Grégy-sur-Yerre, southeast of Paris. The town of Nemours was flooded and largely evacuated by authorities who sent kayaks and inflatable boats to rescue the city’s inhabitants, while hundreds of workers tried to prevent flooding in Orléans, where several major highways have been blocked.

Flooding has overtaken several famous monuments, including Chambord Castle in the Loire valley, which is surrounded by floodwaters.

In Paris, while the Seine is still below the levels of the historic 1910 floods, when the river rose over 8 meters, flooding is already hitting basements in parts of the city and forcing museum staff to scramble to evacuate precious artwork from storage at the Louvre and Orsay museums. Both museums are currently closed until next week.

French President François Hollande blamed the flood on global warming. “I do not want the bad weather, which is unfortunately very serious, that is affecting my country to make people think we are not affected by this phenomenon,” he said “When there are climate phenomena of this seriousness, we must all be conscious that we must act on a global scale.”

Global warming modifies ocean currents and the jet stream in Europe, according to many scientific forecasts.

Meteorologists blamed the current heavy storms that caused the flooding on a sudden dip in the jet stream, which brings warmer air rising off the earth's surface into contact with far colder air in the upper atmosphere, causing unusually fierce and protracted storms.

These have clearly overwhelmed the existing civil engineering structures and dam systems designed to protect central France from flooding.



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