

US death toll rises in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew

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13 October 2016

Tens of thousands in the southeast United States continue to be impacted in the wake of Hurricane Matthew, which came ashore late last week. Thirty-eight people have died due to circumstances caused by the storm, including record flooding.

Over the weekend, areas throughout the southeast US—including the states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia—saw record levels of rainfall. According to [Climatesignals.org](http://climatesignals.org), three tide gauges from Georgia to Virginia saw record-setting storm surges from Friday through Sunday. In addition, areas farther inland saw flooding for hundreds of miles. One location, Fayetteville, NC, saw more than double its previous rainfall record of 6.80 inches Saturday, when it rained more than 14 inches in a single evening.

More than half of the deaths, 20, occurred in North Carolina, as cities and towns have been inundated with surging rivers along the shores. As of Wednesday, 110,000 people in North Carolina still remained without power in their homes. Over 4,200 of the state's residents have been evacuated to shelters in nearby schools and recreation centers. Throughout the state, over 2,000 people required emergency evacuation, including 100 needing airlifts, as floodwaters destroyed nearly 7,000 homes.

In Greenville, over 10 percent of the city's more than 90,000 residents have been evacuated. The city's regional airport has grounded flights until October 20 and nearby East Carolina University has canceled classes.

"Certain parts of the state were still going through ongoing floods. And now we have other parts of the state that are about to deal with some very serious circumstances, especially along two of our major rivers," said North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, referring to conditions along both the Tar and Neuse

rivers in the northeast part of the state.

As of Monday October 10, as many as one-third of the state's 100 counties remained under an official state of emergency. On Monday night, a North Carolina state trooper shot and killed a man in the town of Lumberton in the state's southeast. According to a statement released by the governor, the police killing occurred in a "swift water" incident as police were involved in search and rescue. The name of the individual killed is being withheld until further information is available.

McCrory warned residents, "[d]o not get near the water ... It will kill you" while declaring that it was "unacceptable" that some still had not evacuated high-danger areas.

Hurricane Matthew's record rainfalls occurred even as the storm system dissipated and the hurricane was downgraded to a post-tropical storm. "When it comes to extreme precipitation, the human fingerprint is clear," stated the website *Popular Science*. The website noted that as global temperatures increase, higher levels of condensation will be stored in the atmosphere, leading to increased rainfalls.

"While Matthew didn't produce many iconic scenes of palm trees felled by high-speed winds," it added, "[t]he biggest hazards often come in small doses—a million tiny drops that add up to a devastating flood."

Aside from excoriating the public for supposedly failing to take the flood warnings seriously, US officials offered little more than public gestures of hand-wringing and empty condolences to the millions affected by the storm and floods. Such were the statements of President Barack Obama, who was in North Carolina Tuesday to stump for Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton: "A lot of communities are dealing with terrible flooding... Lives have been lost, and so the entire country has been thinking about North

Carolina.”

As is the case in such circumstances, aside from a few rhetorical platitudes, no serious steps will be taken to compensate those who have had their livelihoods and homes destroyed by the hurricane.

Nor will the crumbling US infrastructure be upgraded in order to cope with the predicted effects of disasters caused by climate change. According to a 2013 infrastructure report in North Carolina, 29 percent of the state’s dams are considered “high hazard,” meaning that their failure could lead to significant loss of life, homes, utilities, highways or roads and commercial buildings. According to the report, less than 30 percent of dams deemed “high hazard” have emergency action plans put in place that meet federal standards.

In addition, the report notes that over 60 percent of communities statewide lack steady storm water infrastructure funding, meaning they are forced to raise funds locally for any significant infrastructure projects, a task which is considerably harder to do in more impoverished areas.

An article published Wednesday in the *Washington Post* details the social impact of the flooding in North Carolina. “The flooding has dealt a direct blow to the poorest section of North Carolina, a tract of farmland and towns struggling after losing manufacturing jobs,” it says. The *Post* quotes Rev. William Barber, the president of the state’s chapter of the NAACP, as saying “[w]hen a flood like this hits, the pain of it is exacerbated by the poverty... What we’re talking about, particularly in eastern Carolina, are some of the poorest communities in the country—black and white, who already had economic challenges before something like this.”



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