

Floods, tornadoes kill 13 across US South as Trump plans major cuts to disaster relief

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1 May 2017

At least thirteen people, including three children, are dead across the American Midwest and South due to a series of tornados and floods that hit over the weekend.

Entirely preventable, the deaths were caused by the lack of public infrastructure, planning, or spending on disaster relief. Although floods and tornados are relatively common in the impacted areas, the ruling class ignores the needs of this deeply impoverished region.

Local officials found what they believe to be clothing belonging to two missing children, a four-year-old boy and his 18-month-old sister, who were swept away by floodwaters in Madison County, Missouri. The children's mother tried to save the two after their family car was swept off the roadway Saturday afternoon, but the young children slid out of her hands and into the rushing water.

A 10-year-old girl was also swept away by flooding that struck Springdale, Arkansas Saturday night. Officials recovered her body late that night. In DeWitt, Arkansas, 65-year-old Julia Schwede was crushed by a tree in her mobile home. Many of those killed were elderly people caught in their vehicles, unable to escape the rising waters. Missouri declared a state of emergency and activated the National Guard.

East Texas was worst hit by tornados, which killed four and injured over fifty.

Ernestine Cook, a resident of East Texas, told Dallas television station WFAA that the tornados "hit so hard, so fast. It just kept moving. I've never seen anything like it after 22 years of living here."

Roughly three dozen people have been killed by tornados in the US so far this year. Two thirds of those killed are impoverished mobile home residents, according to a Weather.com report from early April. These types of homes provide no shelter for residents,

who are either crushed by debris or sucked up into the deadly cyclones.

The administration of President Donald Trump is proposing to cut 11 percent of the budget for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is ostensibly responsible for disaster relief. The *New York Times* noted in March: "At FEMA, potential cuts would target for reduction an array of grants to state and local governments that have helped fund the development of emergency preparedness and response plans for natural disasters..."

According to the administration, funds for disaster relief will instead be used to construct a border wall separating the US and Mexico and for an intensified plan to militarize the border region.

In Oklahoma, the site of the Moore Tornado, which killed 24 people in 2013, Trump's budget cut would reduce funding for the state's emergency relief program by 85 percent.

Oklahoma Congressman Steve Russell told residents not to worry about the impact of the cuts, asking sardonically: "You got to look at it like, does this really mean that the US is going to tell Oklahoma if they face a tornado, we're sorry?"

The answer is yes.

Not only will more poor and working-class residents of these regions be killed as a result of the budget cuts, but relief to help people whose homes were destroyed will also be cut.

The Trump administration is also planning to slash \$6.2 billion from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, headed by retired neurosurgeon and religious fundamentalist Ben Carson. HUD provides funding for the Community Development Block Grant Program, which provides money to people whose homes are destroyed in natural disasters.

Trump also announced in March that his administration would cut \$2.4 billion from federal transportation programs that fund road and transit programs in rural areas like the ones affected by this weekend's storms. It is precisely due to a lack of spending on infrastructure that many of the region's roads are prone to flooding, making travel dangerous in storms.

The regions devastated by the storms are overwhelmingly poor.

Madison County, Missouri, where the two young children were lost in a flood, has a per capita income of just \$15,825 and a median family income of \$37,474. The county is 98 percent white.

Springdale, Arkansas, where the 10-year-old girl drowned, 39 percent of children live below the poverty line. DeWitt, Arkansas, where Julia Schwede was crushed by a tree in her mobile home, per capita income is at \$18,993 and median family income is at \$42,917.

Those killed are the victims of the capitalist system, under which the ruling class directs society's resources toward war and speculation in order to enrich a tiny oligarchy. The needs of the working class—whether for shelter in Tornado Alley or for water in Flint, Michigan—are ignored as working-class children and elderly people are killed by the wind and rain.



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