

New details highlight criminal neglect in death of Florida nursing home residents

Niles Niemuth
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The deaths on Wednesday of eight Florida nursing home residents in Hollywood, Florida, left to swelter in extreme heat after Hurricane Irma knocked out power, have exposed the incompetence and indifference of the ruling class, which bears ultimate responsibility for this social crime.

The more than 150 residents of the Rehabilitation Center at Hollywood Hills were left to suffer in extreme humidity and temperatures in the building approaching 110 Fahrenheit (43 Celsius).

While the facility had a generator, it was used only to power the kitchen. When power was restored by utility provider Florida Power and Light (FPL), portable air conditioning units and fans were employed, but they made little difference for the residents. The central air conditioning unit remained offline, the transformer that powered it having been damaged in the storm.

Hollywood Hills staff called 911 early Wednesday morning after residents began to complain that they felt ill. The first patient was rushed across the street to Memorial Regional Hospital at around 3 a.m. After the third patient arrived some two hours later, hospital staff rushed across the street to check on the nursing home and found residents suffering in unbearable heat.

“We had no idea the extent of what was going on until we literally sent people room to room to check on people,” Dr. Randy Katz, Memorial’s chairman of emergency medicine told the *New York Times*. Katz reported that at least one patient from the nursing home had come into the emergency room on Tuesday seeking treatment, but no suspicions were raised about potentially life-threatening conditions at the facility.

Three of the victims were found dead in their rooms, a fourth body was located at a funeral home, and the remaining victims died at the hospital. At least 40 of the residents were identified as having trouble

breathing and suffering from life-threatening conditions.

The eight victims were identified Wednesday by the Broward County Medical Examiner as Carolyn Eatherly, 78; Miguel Antonio Franco, 92; Estella Hendricks, 71; Betty Hibbard, 84; Manuel Mario Medieta, 96; Gail Nova, 71; Bobby Owens, 84; and Albertina Vega, 99.

Jeffery Nova, the son of Gail Nova, who had lived in the facility for eight years, told the *Miami Herald* that he had picked Hollywood Hills because it was so close to Memorial Hospital. “If she needed care, they literally had only feet to go,” he said.

Promotional material on the nursing home’s web site boasts that it is located across the street from the hospital, guaranteeing that “our patients have access to even more of the finest health care at all hours of the day and night.”

It remained unclear why nursing home staff waited so long to call for help, as the hospital never lost power or air conditioning during the storm or its aftermath.

The hospital had been designated as a “critical infrastructure facility” by Florida Power and Light and Broward County, while Hollywood Hills and nursing homes in general had not been designated as critical and were not a priority for the utility company.

FPL and Broward County officials sought to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the horror in the nursing home, each blaming the other for the failure to define nursing homes as critical facilities and seeking to shift blame onto the nursing home staff.

A spokesman for FPL claimed that the company did not consider Hollywood Hills a critical facility because Broward County had not designated it as such. Broward County Mayor Barbara Sharief in turn released a statement blaming FPL guidance documents for the

county's designation of nursing homes as "non-critical."

Sharief also reported that while Hollywood Hills staff had reported to the county's Emergency Operations Center that a tree had fallen on the air conditioner's power transformer, no emergency responders were sent to investigate because they "did not request assistance or indicate any medical emergency existed."

Hollywood Hills administrator Jorge Carballo reported that the facility had contacted FPL immediately about the damaged transformer and followed up repeatedly for updates on when a repair could be made.

Even after the tragedy at Hollywood Hills, 62 out of Florida's 700 nursing homes remained without power on Thursday, leaving thousands of elderly residents at risk. At least 80 residents were evacuated from the Crystal Bay Assisted Living Facility in North Miami Beach Wednesday due to a lack of air conditioning. Century Village, a retirement community in nearby Pembroke Pines, remained without power Thursday.

Even as the disaster that has enveloped much of Florida in Hurricane Irma's aftermath continued to unfold, President Donald Trump made a visit to Fort Myers and Naples on the state's Gulf Coast to praise the government response to the storm. He made no reference to the deaths in Hollywood.

"We're going to see some of the folks and make sure they're happy," Trump told reporters in Fort Myers, which was inundated by the storm surge. "I think we're doing a good job in Florida."

More than 150 people have been killed by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and hundreds of thousands in the US have lost their homes or livelihoods, but the corporate media is boasting of the supposedly much improved response to these storms as compared to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster. Citing the lower death toll in comparison to the more than 1,800 fatalities in Katrina, while ignoring the far wider impact of the recent storms in terms of homes destroyed, jobs lost and communities devastated, and the lack of planning and neglect of infrastructure exposed by this month's hurricanes, the *New York Times* on Wednesday published a front-page lead article with the headline "US Shows Signs Of Improvement In Aid Response."

Only hours later the news broke of the eight elderly Florida residents killed by official neglect and

indifference in the aftermath of Irma.



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