

Ellicott City, Maryland hit by major flood, one reported dead

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1 June 2018

The town of Ellicott City, Maryland, a suburb of 65,000 about 14 miles west of Baltimore, was inundated with water on Sunday after heavy rains created a “1,000-year flood,” marking the second time in two years the city has experienced the once in a millennium catastrophe. One man has been reported dead so far.

Eddison Hermond was killed by the flood waters after attempting to rescue a local shopkeeper, Kate Bowman, as she was trying to flee the area with her cat, when the unexpectedly strong rains caused flash flooding that overwhelmed the sandbags she had packed around her store. Hermond, 39, had been celebrating the Memorial Day weekend with friends at a nearby restaurant when the incident occurred. He was a father of one and a member of the Maryland Army National Guard.

Bowman was able to reach higher ground and survived the incident.

The flooding was caused when approximately 10 inches of rain fell in six hours, most of that within a two-hour time frame. Ellicott City, considered a suburb of Baltimore, is positioned along the Patapsco River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay. A smaller tributary of the Patapsco, the Tiber River, flows through the city’s historic downtown district.

Many residents were trapped inside local businesses along the city’s Main Street by the unexpected flooding. Waters reached up to the first floor at many spots, and multiple vehicles were swept away. Emergency response crews performed as many as 300 rescue operations in Howard County, and most of the area lost power. Maryland Governor Larry Hogan has declared a state of emergency for the area.

Residents and county officials remarked to the media that Sunday’s flood seemed to be worse than the flood of 2016, which killed two people. The first floors and

basements of homes and businesses in the area were completely inundated, and in some areas, the floodwaters reached to the second floor. A large sinkhole said to be 25 to 30 feet wide emerged on the north end of the Main Street area where the road had collapsed due to the flooding.

The Patapsco River rose 17.8 feet within a two-hour time frame on Sunday before cresting at 24.13 feet, surpassing the previous record of 23.6 feet.

Many area businesses had only recently re-opened after completing repairs caused by the 2016 flood. The town had recently been the recipient of a \$1.5 million dollar grant, split between two other flood-prone areas, which was supposed to fund a series of 48 stream gauges in the area to monitor water levels and feed residents information in real time over the internet about potential flooding. The first series of gauges was scheduled to go online in June.

The city was also in the process of constructing new storm water retention ponds and flood prevention infrastructure. According to CNN, the town had only just received funds from FEMA for reconstruction related to the 2016 flood. Howard County executive Allen Kittleman told the network “You can’t get things done in a year or two, it just can’t happen. And you saw, we get the money from FEMA two years later. That’s how it works.”

Even if the early warning system had been operational at the time of Sunday’s flood, it is unlikely that it would have prevented any damage. Ellicott City, founded in 1868, has been subject to flooding over a dozen times since 1817 due to its position in the Patapsco Valley. In recent decades, development of the surrounding areas has made flooding more frequent because rainwaters are not absorbed into the paved surfaces, but instead flow down into the river.

According to the *Baltimore Sun*, between 2001 and 2016, county officials approved over 100 developments in the three-square mile area around Ellicott City. The *Sun* reports that roughly 28 percent of the watershed area for the Tiber and Hudson tributaries is covered by impermeable surfaces such as roads and driveways.

In a comment made to the *Sun*, John Hommerbocker, a local plumber who had helped repair businesses damaged by the 2016 flood, commented on the effect development had in increasing the damage caused by Sunday's flood: "What they didn't figure on was all the concrete and impervious surfaces from all the new developments uphill. No matter what, that stream is only so big, it worked perfectly for 100 years, before all the impervious surfaces were added uphill."

After the flooding in 2016, attempts to place a moratorium on future development throughout the area known as the Tiber-Hudson watershed were ultimately unsuccessful.

As the effects of global warming grow year after year, continuously exceeding the direst predictions of climate scientists, disasters like the flooding in Ellicott City will occur with ever greater frequency. Mitigating the effects of future disasters requires the utilization of the full resources of the global economy. Even the most far-reaching attempts to prevent and minimize the damage caused by natural disasters are doomed to failure as long as those efforts are constrained by the capitalist profit system.



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