

Torrential rain and flash floods kill seven people in Nashville and middle Tennessee

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At the end of March, record rainfall of more than seven inches over a two-day period caused flooding in middle Tennessee, including Nashville, leading to seven deaths.

Nashville's highest two-day recorded rainfall began on Saturday, March 27 and ended only in the early hours of Palm Sunday, March 28. Emergency workers used boats to rescue some 100 people stranded by flood water that surrounded their vehicles and homes. According to media reports, dozens of other residents were rescued in the adjacent counties of Wilson, Williamson and Rutherford.

The National Weather Service received more than 250 reports of severe weather from East Texas to North Carolina, including 16 reports of tornadoes, 100 instances of damaging winds and nearly 140 reports of large hail.

According to Nashville Electric Service officials, about 16,000 Nashville residents lost electrical power because of the storm and resulting flooding. The *Washington Post* reported, "Weather Service received reports of people fleeing to their attics and clinging to trees amid surging floodwaters."

"It's been a very tough year," Antioch resident Everette Miles, 62, told *The Tennessean*. "You're trying to keep up with paying your rent and light bills and stuff, and then right here happens."

Antioch is a working class suburb of Nashville that has suffered serious flooding in the past from two streams, Seven Mile Creek and Mill Creek, the latter of which accounted for three of the five deaths in metropolitan Nashville.

The flood revealed the growing class divisions and income inequality in the "It" city, as Nashville has come to be known as a result of its rapid growth and the increasing presence of major corporations.

Homelessness has also grown, heightening the tragic human toll of the flood.

"It's a pretty dire situation for our friends that are experiencing homelessness, with the housing crisis layered with the economic crisis and pandemic," said Lindsey Krinks of the charity organization Open Table Nashville.

In Nashville, as across the US and internationally, the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply intensified pre-existing social and economic contradictions, impacting the working class most brutally.

Over the past year, thousands in the metro region have lost their jobs, been evicted from their homes and joined the ranks of the homeless. Blue tarps have proliferated, marking homeless encampments and entire small communities of homeless people. Many of these encampments have been erected on wooded flood plains of the Cumberland River and its small tributaries. Most, if not all, of these camp sites disappeared under flood waters or became uninhabitable due to strong winds, downed trees and torrential rains. Many homeless residents lost everything but the clothes on their back.

Two of those found dead near what was likely their homeless camp along Seven Mile Creek in Antioch were Fredrick Richards, 64, and Melissa Conquest, 46. Richards was physically disabled and required the use of a wheelchair.

Many of metro Nashville's homeless are not included in the annual count, which, in any event, was not carried out this year because of COVID-19.

"It really doesn't capture all the people who are sleeping in hotels or motels or doubling up on couches or things like that," Krinks told the media, adding that the annual count covers only some 10 percent to 15 percent of Nashville's homeless.

All of those killed by the flood were elderly Nashvillians. Douglas Hammond, 65, was found dead on a golf course, likely “swept away by high water” after leaving a vehicle stuck in a culvert, local media reported. Garry Cole, 70, was found dead in a submerged vehicle in a swollen creek, according to the police department.

Many working class families living in single homes or apartments faced the type of dangers generally associated with underdeveloped countries. A mudslide on Antioch’s Linbar Drive trapped more than a dozen people in an apartment complex.

“You don’t think that tiny little creek can get that vicious,” Abbe Bolduc, one of 15 people rescued from CityVue Apartments on Sunday, told WZTV news.

An Antioch homeowner, who asked not to be identified, spoke to the WSWS about her community near Mill Creek and its problems. The area is working class, with many Hispanic and Middle Eastern residents. It has always had to deal with flooding, along with the accompanying health hazards.

“This area flooded badly in 70s (and) sewer overflow comes into Mill Creek, so there was an odor after the flood,” she explained. “I sure wish the city would address that. I mean people fish in this creek—and I wish they wouldn’t. And children sometimes play in it. It would sure be nice if the sewer overflow would stop.”

Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) contain “untreated or partially treated human and industrial waste, toxic materials, and debris as well as stormwater,” according to the Environmental Protection Agency. “Inadequate carrying capacity (and) leaking pipes,” according to USGS.gov, are two factors leading to CSOs, reflecting the long history of neglect and underfunding of basic health and social services in Nashville and throughout Tennessee.

Rather than providing funding to upgrade the state’s infrastructure, Nashville, controlled for decades by the Democratic Party, has opened up its coffers to woo major corporations with cash. The same policy has been pursued by the state government.

According to the *Nashville Business Journal*, the most recent figures, covering the 2016-2017 fiscal year, reveal that the state awarded more than \$1.3 billion in tax credits, 30 percent higher than previously reported.

A wall collapsed in a warehouse built close to Mill

Creek, spewing items into the creek, which overflowed its banks and swamped yards, homes and parks before flooding into the Cumberland River.

“It looks to me like (the warehouse) went up way too close to Mill Creek and never should have been built there,” said the Antioch homeowner quoted above. “There were restaurant gloves the servers wear. There are ‘Thank You’ bags, garbage bags, plastic lids for cups, styrofoam, plastic straws, keyboards, Dell computers, pallets. We have miles and miles of debris. We don’t know how far this pollution extends... and the plastic is not going to deteriorate.

“Does Biden’s infrastructure plan address things like this? Does it address buildings too close to creeks and waterways? Does it address low income, because this tends to happen in low income areas? I think it is a bigger issue. I think the country if not the world has this issue.”

This is not the first serious flood to hit Nashville in recent history. In 2010, Nashville experienced a “1,000-year flood” that killed 11 people and caused \$2 billion in damage.

It has been barely a year since a tornado ripped through Nashville and Middle Tennessee killing 25 people.

This will not be the last flood, and there will be more tornadoes and natural disasters. “The *Climate Science Special Report*, the science basis of the fourth National Climate Assessment, also notes that both the frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events are projected to continue to increase over the next century as our climate warms due to human-caused climate change,” Climate.Gov states.



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