

Florida condominium collapse leaves a dozen injured, four confirmed dead and 159 missing

Tim Rivers
25 June 2021

The collapse of an oceanfront condominium tower just off the beach in Surfside, Florida, north of Miami Beach, early Thursday morning filled news networks and social media feeds with horrifying scenes of its towering structure ripped apart in the dead of night crushing as yet unknown numbers of residents under broken concrete.

More than a day after the collapse, authorities are still unable to give an accurate count of the deceased and injured, confirming four deaths and 159 people missing.

Survivors, many of them injured, were left dangling from their balconies to be plucked to safety by the dozens of rescue teams who rushed vehicles and heavy equipment to the Champlain Towers South. Nearly three dozen survivors had been pulled from the wreckage Thursday and ten injured persons were treated at the scene while at least two others were transported to a local hospital.

A young mother's leg had to be amputated on site, said Frank Rollason, director of Miami-Dade Emergency Management, to free her from the death trap while members of one of his search-and-rescue teams sheltered her daughter.

The oceanside condominium, where prices range from \$350,000 to \$750,000, had become a war zone of twisted steel, broken concrete and the anguished screams of trapped and searching residents. A young boy was pulled from the rubble after bystanders heard his screams and saw his hand sticking up from the concrete.

Rollason said the building to the south, which is newer, seems to be stable. The building to the north, however, is older and had to be evacuated. The Solara Surfside hotel, next to the tower that collapsed, was also evacuated.

The apartments that face the water at Champlain Towers South, which was completed in 1981 with 130 units at 8777 Collins Ave., collapsed at around 1:23 a.m. Thursday while many residents were asleep in their beds.

A disturbing aspect of the tragic events are the detailed descriptions provided by a few of the residents of the unmistakable warning signs that they had previously noticed of the impending disaster.

Adriana Chi said her brother, sister-and-law and teenage niece lived in a ninth-floor unit and that her father has owned the unit for about 30 years. She told the *Miami Herald* there were chronic leaks and said, "The last time I was there, I looked at him and I said: 'I am serious. This building is going to collapse.'"

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue spokeswoman Maggie Castro said more than 80 rescue units from all over the county rushed to the scene and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency that allows federal assistance to be brought to the area.

Rescue workers are using dogs and sensitive microphones and cameras to locate survivors. Castro commented that the rescue work was particularly dangerous because the rubble and the remains of the tower are unstable.

Construction work to repair the building's roof over the last 30 days will be a subject of concern for investigators.

The curing process for concrete is continuous from the time that it is placed and causes hairline cracks as a normal result of shrinkage during the process, which is not dangerous because the concrete mix and placement of reinforcing steel are designed for it. But when concrete structural members begin to deform and cracks in the concrete open to exceed design tolerances, such details represent clear warning signs of impending

failure.

While not frequent in the United States, there have been major building collapses in Massachusetts, Missouri, South Carolina, New York, Florida, Louisiana, and Connecticut over the last 50 years that have claimed multiple lives.

The five-story condominium called Harbour Cay in Cocoa Beach, Florida, collapsed on March 27, 1981, due to multiple construction and design flaws while workers were pouring concrete for the roof slab, according to *Florida Today*. The collapse killed 11 people and injured 23 others.

The 400-room, eight-story Grand Central Hotel opened in 1870 in New York, at the time one of the largest and most elegant hotels in the U.S. On August 3, 1973, the hotel collapsed due to “years of neglect and unreported interior renovation work,” according to Village Preservation, killing four people.

Two other historic collapses are reminiscent of the horrifying images of the World Trade Center, which collapsed inward as the upper floors progressively broke the structural members underneath them like so many dominoes, then bringing both towers tumbling to the ground.

A 16-story high-rise apartment building at 2000 Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, Massachusetts, collapsed Jan. 25, 1971. A failure during construction of the roof precipitated a collapse “all the way to the basement,” resulting in the deaths of four workers.

Internationally, the March 2020 collapse of a hotel in China being used as a quarantine center for people possibly infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus sparked widespread public anger over the measures taken by the regime in Beijing to curb the virus.

Of the 71 people inside the Xinjia Hotel, in the city of Quanzhou, Fujian Province, 29 died in the collapse.

The *World Socialist Web Site* reported on the outrage of residents at the hotel’s collapse and solidarity with those trapped. On the evening of March 7, the accident was the top trending topic on the social networking site Weibo, China’s version of Twitter. One person wrote: “The Quanzhou government must be scrutinized! This is not a natural disaster. This is a man-made disaster!” Another wrote: “Gravely hold those responsible accountable.”

Building collapses and industrial accidents are common in capitalist China, where companies often cut

corners and ignore safety regulations to inflate profits. In May of 2019, a building undergoing renovations in Shanghai collapsed, killing 10 construction workers.

The WSWS noted, “Many people on social media referred to the hotel as another example of ‘tofu-dreg construction,’ meaning shoddy work. This term gained wide use after the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, when several schools collapsed as a result of poor construction, leading to the deaths of thousands of children.”

The collapse in Surfside also echoes the devastating 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London, England, in which 72 men, women and children died in their apartments. The social murder that was committed at Grenfell was the immediate outcome of a decision to cover the building in cheap, flammable cladding, which allowed a fire in one apartment to quickly spread to the whole tower.



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