

More warnings of significant water damage prior to collapse of Surfside, Florida condo come to light

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Further information emerged on Tuesday that warnings had been made about the condition of the Champlain Towers South condominium in Surfside, Florida before the 12-story building collapsed to the ground in the early morning of June 24.

Thirty-six hours before the collapse of the structure, a contractor, who had been asked to provide a bid for cosmetic restoration of the pool and for new pool equipment at the complex, said he had seen “water all over the parking garage.”

Speaking to the *Miami Herald*, the contractor, who asked not to be named, said he had worked in the commercial pool industry for decades. The amount of water appeared so unusual to him that he asked about it as a building staff person showed him around the facility.

The contractor said, “I thought to myself, that’s not normal,” when the building employee told him, “it was waterproofing issues.” Additionally, the building employee told the contractor that water was pumped out of the pool equipment room so frequently that the pump motors were replaced every two years. There was no discussion of the structural issues or cracks in the concrete evident in photos taken by the contractor in the pool equipment room.

The photos show the pool equipment room on the south side of the underground garage where exposed and corroding rebar in the concrete slab can be seen clearly overhead. The *Miami Herald* reported the contractor “snapped some pictures and sent them to his supervisor along with a note expressing concern that the job might be a bit more complicated than expected. He worried they would have to remove pool pipes to allow concrete restoration experts access to repair the

slabs.”

The contractor noticed a puddle of standing water in the garage around parking spot 78, an area that building plans indicate is directly under the pool deck. This area was flagged in the 2018 inspection report provided by building engineer Frank Morabito as a “major error” in the original building design that allowed water intrusion into the concrete and caused significant erosion and weakening of the structural concrete slabs below.

The number of confirmed dead increased to 12 on Tuesday as rescue workers continued their urgent task of digging through the mound of rubble. At the time of this writing, the count of individuals unaccounted for stood at 149, with hopes of finding any survivors fading after six days of effort.

More than 60 agencies and 800 responders—along with dogs specially trained to find victims—are assisting around the clock to complete the task of finding those who are still missing. Rescue and recovery workers can be seen on video footage picking through the wreckage by hand, looking for remains of the victims among the millions of pounds of crumbled concrete, rebar, furniture and personal items from the horrific event.

Retired postal worker Raysa Rodriguez, who lived in the Champlain South Towers for 17 years and survived the disaster, gave a first-person account of the event as part of a newly filed lawsuit. Rodriguez lived in Unit 907 and said that initially the building “swayed like a piece of paper.” She tried to turn on a light and discovered the power was out and then ran to the balcony of her apartment “and a wall of dust hit me.”

After calls to her neighbor and brother went unanswered, she ran into the hallway. She wrote in her

description, “I looked left to the north end of the building. A concrete column had pierced the hallway from floor to ceiling. I looked at the elevators. The elevator shafts were exposed, the doors were gone.”

Rodriguez sprinted to the stairwell exit, opened the door and saw a terrifying scene, “The beach side of Champlain had collapsed, pancaked,” she wrote. “I screamed in horror.”

A report in the *Miami Herald* says, “Like the other lawsuits, Rodriguez’s lawyers contend that the condo association engaged in ‘reckless and negligent conduct’ by ignoring long-needed repairs to the building. The class-action suit asks that similar lawsuits be consolidated, and that evidence be preserved to ‘determine everyone who is to blame for this tragedy and all of them be held responsible.’”

There are as many as 30 theories being considered by experts for the cause of the structural failure, but none are definitive. National Public Radio interviewed independent investigator John Pistorino on Tuesday morning. Pistorino, a longtime structural engineering consultant retained by an attorney to investigate the building collapse, said that a group of experts will be assembled after the site is cleared and take the material to a site and “try to reconstruct the building and look at the critical pieces to see if they can figure out how each piece failed and what the significance was.”

Pistorino was involved in developing the 40-year recertification requirement in Dade County that was apparently underway at the condominium that was built in 1981. He came up with the program after the collapse in 1974 of the Drug Enforcement Agency building in Miami that killed seven people and injured 16 others.

He explained that normally during an investigation of a failure like this, samples would be taken to a lab to determine if steel was corroded and geotech engineering experts would do borings under the former building “into the foundation areas in the piles and see what the condition of the soil in the foundation is at that time as well.”

Pointing the finger at building officials, Pistorino said that he has been involved with other buildings in the area “where repairs are significant... if there’s any kind of a potential life safety issue, the fact that repairs are necessary isn’t really the issue. The building official has to be informed.”

With demands for answers from family members of the victims and the public in general rising, both the Democrats and Republicans have stepped up in an effort to deflect anger and blame from being focused on the political and economic roots of the collapse.

When Republican Governor DeSantis was standing in a large room at the Grand Beach Hotel Surfside last Saturday with family members, he was denounced by a relative who told him he was not doing enough. After a search and rescue team representative told the group that human remains had been found, the family member said, “Imagine if your children were in there. You are going to leave here, and you are going to take a nice picture. I know you are doing everything you can, but it’s not enough.”

The White House announced on Tuesday that President Biden and First Lady Jill Biden will travel to Surfside on Thursday to visit the site. Press Secretary Jen Psaki said, “They want to thank the heroic first responders, search-and-rescue teams and everyone who’s been working tirelessly around the clock.” Psaki also said the two will meet with families “forced to endure this terrible tragedy” and “offer them comfort as search-and-rescue efforts continue.”

As with every previous disaster in recent decades in which a large number of people were killed by the indifference and negligence of the government and financial oligarchy—such as Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Maria—the appearance of the US president at the site is the surest sign that a cover-up is underway.

Biden will make his appearance, give a few perfunctory remarks and maybe even shed a tear for the families of the victims, but in the end, his administration will do nothing to uncover the true cause of the collapse or prevent similar disasters or worse from happening again in the future.



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