

Death toll in Surfside, Florida condo tower collapse rises to 94

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The number of confirmed dead from the Champlain Towers South building collapse in Surfside, Florida, increased to 94 on Monday as officials said that the remains of four more people were recovered from the debris. The list of unaccounted-for individuals now stands at 22.

In a morning press briefing, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said 83 of these victims had been identified and, of those, 80 families have been notified. Levine Cava also said that the grim task of identifying those who were crushed to death on June 24, when the mostly concrete 12-story seaside condominium pancaked in the early morning hours as residents lay in bed, is growing more difficult the deeper the crews dig into the rubble.

Among the names of the victims released by authorities on Monday are Lisa Rosenberg, 27; Arnold Notkin, 87; Judith Spiegel, 65; Margarita Bello, 68; Cassie Stratton, 40; Fabian Nunez, 57; Catalina Ramirez, 45; Nicole Doran, 43; and Beatriz Guerra, 52.

Torrential rain has also slowed the process down as the search effort was halted three times between midnight and 9 a.m. Monday, and again for about three hours between noon and 3 p.m. Storms knocked over prayer candles and bouquets of flowers at the makeshift memorial on Harding Avenue.

The mayor said that at this point recovery is only “yielding human remains” as opposed to bodies, which makes the identification process more challenging. With the span of time since the condo collapse reaching 19 days, the decomposition of human flesh in the high heat and humidity of the South Florida climate makes even fingerprint identification impossible and only DNA analysis can confirm the identity of the victims.

Miami-Dade Medical Examiner Dr. Emma Lew told the *Miami Herald* that the remains are deteriorating in

ways that make it harder to even recover DNA. “We are getting into a state where the tissues are disintegrating, a state where we just have bones.”

Meanwhile, the family members of the missing and unidentified residents of Champlain Towers South must wait in a state of emotional torment thinking about the final seconds of horror experienced by their loved ones.

Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said the crews working on the rubble pile had reached the underground parking garage in some areas of the digging. The condition of the vehicles in this substructure exhibited the terrible damage and “violence of the collapse.”

Personal items are being recovered, tagged and stored in bags. The bags are being placed into shipping containers as part of the evidence from the site. Sargent Danny Murillo of the Miami-Dade Police Department, who is in charge of the personal items, said, “As we’re sorting through the property, we pretty much separate it between money, firearms, heirlooms, things of value and other things such as religious artifacts.” Murillo also said he does not know when family members will be able to retrieve personal belongings or those of loved ones.

Thirteen million pounds of concrete had been removed from the site as of Sunday. Items recovered from the rubble are being put into boxes and taken to a warehouse to be inspected by investigators searching for evidence of the cause of the collapse.

The Town of Surfside has hired the services of engineer Allyn Kilsheimer to examine the collapse and explore the various theories about how it happened. Kilsheimer’s team is taking concrete core samples and using ground penetrating radar at the sister Champlain Towers North that is still standing to help the investigation.

He is comparing the information he finds in the north tower with evidence in the debris from the south tower to arrive at a final determination. Kilsheimer said, “We’re looking for a trigger in the south tower. The building sat there for 40 years. ... It may not be one trigger; it may be multiple triggers. There’s no way to know at this point.”

Both local Democrats and Republican Governor DeSantis have been working overtime to cover up the socioeconomic causes of the deadly collapse and offering platitudes and token gestures of support. The latest example of these empty expressions of sympathy was the announcement by Miami-Dade County property appraiser Pedro Garcia that he agreed with Governor DeSantis’s proposal that surviving unit owners and family members of the victims not have to pay property tax due this fall.

On Friday DeSantis signed an executive order that only waived deadlines tied to yearly bills from local governments. According to the *Miami Herald*, “The order doesn’t erase property taxes, but does lift the deadlines for various tax notices as well as the collection of property taxes, delinquent taxes and the deadlines for people who hope to challenge the county over the assessed value of their property.”

The fact that there is even a discussion about property taxes owed by residents and the families of victims of a building that no longer exists, without any reference to the building officials, real estate vultures and big financial interests that lie behind the catastrophe, is an indication of the cover-up that has been underway since the day of the collapse.

In an attempt to blame the condo owners for the Surfside disaster, Governor DeSantis repeated on Monday his initiative to review the Florida condo association regulations including “tightening fiduciary controls” on the homeowner groups. “All this stuff is going to be looked at very, very carefully,” DeSantis said. The governor went on to say that no one knows why the building collapsed but focused on the condo association, “One of the things, I think, that is pretty much true is that you had a lot of problems here. How that association dealt with it, what disclosures were made to the individual unit owners, all of that, I think, is going to be looked at very, very seriously.”

The despicable attempt by DeSantis to pin the death of more than one hundred people on the Champlain

Tower South condo association is completely unsurprising given the fact that the whole political establishment in Florida is preoccupied with protecting real estate values in the Sunshine State. Real estate broker for Condo Black Book in Miami, Sepehr Niakan, told NBC News that demand for units in older buildings that are typically occupied by lower income tenants and retirees has diminished. “The fear of going into an older building is going to be greater, and buyers are going to be much more careful and sensitive to the history of repairs and maintenance of a building, which wasn’t really an issue before,” Niakan said.

Market experts also say that prices for the older condos are dropping, while the largely working class population living in these properties will be put in untenable situations with assessments to make long overdue repairs that they cannot afford. This will then force the current owners to dump the units and, over time, this will in turn lead to another feeding frenzy by real estate developers and parasitic investment groups who want access to the valuable properties on Florida coastline.

A report in *Yahoo News* quoted Paul Sasseville, a real estate agent for Compass Florida, who said he had received a call from a New York investor who asked if the crisis arising from the Surfside collapse would lead to a buying opportunity similar to the financial bonanza that following the destruction of Hurricane Sandy along the East Coast in 2012.

Sasseville said of Miami Beach, “All the best properties were built in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s on this good waterfront land. Now you’re going to see what we call condo terminations, where developers buy out old buildings, tear them down and put up new ones.”



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