

# Number of dead in Surfside, Florida condo collapse increases to 97 as judge authorizes sale of beachfront property

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The number of deaths in the collapse of the high-rise oceanfront condominium in Surfside, Florida increased to 97 on Thursday as the excavation of the rubble pile is now level with the ground.

Of the bodies and human remains recovered by crews working around-the-clock so far, 92 victims have been identified and their families notified of their deaths. So far, more than 26 million pounds of concrete and other debris have been removed from the Champlain Towers South complex site.

The six people identified on Thursday were Maria Notkin, 81, Michelle Anna Pazos, 23, Mihai Radulescu, 82, Valeria Barth, 14, Miguel Leonardo Kaufman, 65, and Rosa Saez, 70. A press release from the office of Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said that the process of identifying victims at this point has “become increasingly difficult” and “we are relying heavily on the work of the medical examiner’s office and the scientific, technical process of identifying human remains.”

Fourteen-year-old Barth was killed along with her parents, Luis Fernando Barth Tobar, 51, and Catalina Gómez, 45. The family was on vacation from Medellin, Colombia and renting unit 204 when the building fell down at approximately 1:25 a.m. on June 24.

The passage of more than three weeks along with the environmental conditions of heat, humidity and salt water, as well as the force of the building collapse upon the eight individuals who have yet to be recovered means that identification is being done with DNA matching. Family members of the missing have been asked to submit DNA samples and, when unidentifiable remains are found, the samples are entered into a system to find a match.

Mayor Levine Cava said in her statement that only the number of victims who have been identified will be reported going forward, “out of respect for the families who are still waiting and to ensure we are reporting the most accurate possible numbers.”

The amount of national news coverage on developments at the Surfside condo site has been reduced dramatically over the past week, as the media and ruling establishment eagerly move to cover up the source of the catastrophe in the capitalist system and the collusion of government regulators with powerful real estate and financial interests going all the way back to the original construction of the building in 1981.

The clearest evidence that the ruling class is attempting to sweep the real cause of the unprecedented building collapse under the rug is the decision on Wednesday by Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman to put the Champlain Towers South site on the market before all the victims have been recovered.

During a hearing with the court-appointed receiver Michael Goldberg—who is handling all of the finances related to the condo collapse—the judge said, “The court wants to monetize whatever property is available so that we can get money in the hands of these victims as soon as possible.” While the two acres of beachfront property are expected to be sold for between \$100 million and \$130 million, the families of the victims are to receive “up to \$2,000” for “end-of-life needs” and \$10,000 is going to families who need relocation assistance.

Judge Hanzman also approved the refund of \$2.4 million in deposits made by condo owners toward the \$15 million in repairs that were part of a 40-year review of the Champlain Towers South building. It is clear

from these developments that the political establishment and courts are moving as rapidly as possible to whitewash the disaster and buy the silence of the families of the victims.

Meanwhile, the sale of the property for redevelopment as another apartment complex or a hotel in Surfside is clearly a lucrative opportunity for real estate speculators who will expect to earn many multiples of their investment. High-rise condo units along the beach in Surfside that were built in the last decade are currently going for between \$2 million and \$33 million.

The decision by Judge Hanzman outraged many family members who demanded that the sale be blocked in favor of the design, construction and dedication of a memorial for those who perished in the disaster.

Martin Lagesfeld, who lost his 26-year-old sister and 28-year-old brother-in-law, told Local 10 that he was in disbelief when he heard the judge approved the sale of the property. "Some developer could come here and build a building on top of this within a few months and everything is forgotten," the 23-year-old Lagesfeld said.

Meanwhile, further evidence emerged on Tuesday that a disaster was unfolding at the Champlain South Towers 15 years after the building was put up. The *Miami-Herald* reported, based on a construction permit from 1996, that the structural integrity of the deck slab at the condo had been an issue for twenty-five years.

The permit that was submitted to the Surfside building department specified that 50 feet of cracks in the pool deck needed to be sealed up and a 20-square-foot slab had to be replaced. According to the report, these repairs were later certified by consulting engineer Tong Le in a letter from November 1997 and the work cost a total of \$156,602.

Although no definitive cause of the collapse has been determined by engineering experts, the pool deck slab has been the focus of considerable attention, particularly since it was the subject of a 2018 report by Morabito Consultants. In his report, engineer Frank Morabito had concluded that the original design of the building permitted significant water pooling and "major structural damage" to the deck slab and specifically mentioned the 1996 repairs as being "insufficient" in addressing the problems.

An indication that the June 24 collapse in Surfside is the tip of the iceberg in the crumbling structures on South Florida coastline, residents of a two-story apartment building in Miami Beach were ordered to evacuate because of concrete deterioration. City authorities ordered residents to leave on Monday and is allowing one week for everyone to be out of the 82-year-old Devon Apartments.

On Thursday, exactly four weeks since the Surfside collapse, a chunk of an apartment rooftop in Northwest Miami-Dade crumpled at 4:15 p.m. and forced residents into the parking lot to await the arrival of fire and emergency crews. No one was injured at the three-story structure that was built in 1972, according to Fox News.

The Democrats and Republicans, with the assistance of the corporate media, are determined to prevent the tragic death of nearly one hundred people in the Surfside collapse from becoming a national political issue or allowing the public discussion to go beyond pointing a finger at a handful of individual building inspectors, construction contractors or the condo owners themselves.

The only way that a thorough investigation is going to be conducted into the failure of the condo structure is if the working class demands a public inquiry that is independent of the two capitalist parties and their cronies in the multi-billion-dollar construction industry.



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