

# Residents of third condo forced to flee as more structural problems exposed after Surfside, Florida, collapse

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On Monday night hundreds of residents were suddenly forced out of their eight-story building when Miami, Florida, building officials found the structure was unsafe. The 137-unit condominium at 5050 NW Seventh Street was placed under an evacuation order from Miami building director Asael “Ace” Marrero, according to NBC 6 South Florida news.

“We obviously don’t feel that it’s safe,” he told the station, explaining that its structural integrity had been further degraded by a contractor who had proceeded with repairs without submitting plans to obtain a permit.

The building had been placed on an unsafe structures list in May, the month before the sudden collapse of the Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida, and received notice of violations on July 7, which included failure to obtain a 40-year recertification, the city reported in a review of an inspection timeline for the property. The Surfside building was undergoing the same 40-year recertification process when it fell, killing 98 residents.

There has been speculation that the location of Champlain Towers South was a key factor in its demise because it was located near the beach, where the garage and key structural members were subject to tidal flooding. By contrast, the Miami condo building is well inland, which raises troubling questions about more pervasive weaknesses in such structures.

The Flagami neighborhood, just south of Blue Lagoon and Miami International Airport, condo spokeswoman Stephanie Severino said, is about six miles west of Biscayne Bay and much farther inland than the high-rise in Surfside. Already prior to the evacuation order, the building was scheduled for a city

hearing on unsafe structures scheduled to occur August 20.

The question remains: How many others among the plethora of high-rise towers erected during the south Florida building boom that began in the late 1970s contain similar structural weaknesses?

Residents were told Monday that they had until early Tuesday morning to clear out, according to CNN affiliate WFOR. They had to use anything they could find at the last minute, including plastic bins, suitcases and garbage bags to gather what they could before exiting. Mya Castanedo described the situation as “very chaotic” and told the station that residents were “not getting a final answer about what’s going on.”

“We have a lot of elderly owners here that have no place to go,” resident Dmidry Asanov said. “Some have Covid. Some can’t walk.” City officials were rushing around looking for temporary housing on Tuesday for those who were left homeless.

“As a result of the inspection, the detached elevated garage to the east was to be closed off due to structural concerns. The damaged columns within the first floor of the main structure required emergency shoring and a subsequent shoring plan had to be immediately submitted. Plans for repairs would be required prior to any further work,” Severino said in a statement.

The city received a letter last Thursday from an engineer employed by the association in an effort to forestall the action, saying residents could remain in the building during the emergency repairs, Severino explained. But it was too little, too late. “No shoring plan, or plans for the repairs were submitted to the City.”

A city inspector examined the structural work being

done last Friday and issued an immediate stop-work order. On Monday, “the Building Department leadership met with the condo association and the contracted Engineer to review the work undertaken without a permit. The result of the assessment found the columns to be structurally insufficient,” Severino added.

Almost two months following the collapse of Champlain Towers South and in spite of the best efforts by both local and state officials to assuage their concerns, a crisis of confidence is gripping ever-widening layers of those who inhabit the many high-rise towers in the immediate vicinity and beyond.

Republican Governor Ron DeSantis and Democratic Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, attempting to “bring closure” to the tragic events of June 24, have issued statements of empathy for the families of those who died as well as for the tower residents who survived. But their seemingly endless banalities have failed to yield the desired result.

Basic questions remain unanswered: Why did it happen? Who is responsible? Whose homes will be next to come crashing down in the middle of the night?

Miami-Dade County officials announced last week a series of “sunshine” meetings to discuss possible policy and legislative changes related to the collapse. The first of these events, slated to include local, state and federal officials, is slated for August 30.

CNN reported Tuesday that Levine Cava said, “As we now move ahead with the task of seeking answers and developing policy remedies, it’s just as critical for us to once again coordinate our efforts to ensure a comprehensive, whole-of-government response.”

But actions speak louder than words. The mayor has been hiding behind claims by the Miami Dade Police Department that they must protect evidence for a homicide investigation to prevent the eminent forensic structural engineer Allyn Kilsheimer, hired by the town of Surfside, from conducting scientific inspections and testing on the fully cleared site, as well as on concrete members that have been moved and stored off site.

Kilsheimer insists that a complete investigation to reveal all the contributing factors in this horrific building failure must be conducted in a timely manner and at the highest scientific level as an obvious first step to prevent a tragic recurrence of the events of June 24. Asked by the *World Socialist Web Site* if he felt

confident that he could recreate and reveal the complex causes of the building failure, he responded, “Yes. We have been able to do that in almost all” of the more than 100 forensic investigations his firm has conducted into major structural failures in an internationally acclaimed career spanning more than five decades.

In an absurd turn of events, the Miami-Dade Police Department issued a request for a local forensic engineer under the county’s Equal Distribution Program more than five weeks after the condo collapsed while Kilsheimer’s team has been on hand waiting to begin testing since the day after it fell. He told the WSWS that he had never before encountered such adamant obstruction in conducting his many forensic investigations.

In a related development last month, some 300 people were evacuated from the Crestview Towers Condominium in North Miami Beach after building officials determined it too was unsafe. A fire was put out in the 156-unit building this past Monday by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue who said an electrical short may have caused the blaze.

After Surfside, the building was condemned and evacuated and was thus left vacant. Hence, there were no reported injuries. City Manager Arthur Sorey III reported that the recertification report for that almost 50-year-old building was delinquent; and upon investigation, city building officials discovered that it was both structurally and electrically unsafe.



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