

At least 43 dead as massive storm ravages US northeast

Sandy English
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Massive flooding inundated broad swaths of the US northeast on Wednesday night, including New York City and downstate New York, as well as New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Areas of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts were also flooded, and tornadoes were reported on Cape Cod.

At least 43 people are dead and more than 250,000 households and businesses are without power. Subway and commuter rail services were halted in many areas, roads were closed and the homes of hundreds of thousands of people were damaged or destroyed.

In New York City alone, at least 12 people died, one in a car stuck in the floodwater and 11 drowned in their basement apartments. Basement apartments, often flouting building codes, are cheaper housing for immigrant workers who live in the most expensive city in the United States. They are often crowded and may house undocumented workers who live in fear of deportation and work some of the lowest paying jobs.

Ang Lama, his wife Mingma Sherpa and their two-year-old son, Lobsang, an immigrant family from Nepal, died in their basement apartment in Woodside, Queens. The apartment has only one door. A neighbor told the media that she believed water was cascading down the staircase outside, which created pressure on the door so that the family could not open it.

As with many New York apartments, the windows were barred and could not be used for escape. A certificate of occupancy obtained by the *New York Times* shows that the death trap the family called home was not approved for residential use.

Five people died in one apartment complex in Elizabeth, New Jersey, including a couple in their 70s and their 38-year-old son, and one in a car in Passaic when the Passaic River overflowed. At least three people died in Pennsylvania, two apparently by

drowning.

Transportation systems have been inundated. The worst conditions were seen in the New York City subway system. Photos posted by riders on Twitter showed water gushing down stairways and on top of trains. According to the MTA, people had to be evacuated from approximately 20 subway cars. Dozens of central auto arteries were closed down, including the New York State Thruway. One road in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, simply crumbled under the impact of the rain.

Residents throughout the region were given almost no time to prepare for the massive flooding. New York Governor Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency only at 1:42 a.m. on Thursday morning, after the region was flooded. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio mentioned the rain only briefly at a press conference on Wednesday.

This is despite the fact that the flooding should have been anticipated. One meteorologist told the online journal *The City*, “The signs were here all week for a significant rain event. Yesterday the Weather Prediction Center had us at a pretty rare high risk of excessive rainfall for our area, which is pretty rare to see.”

The storm is from the remnants of Hurricane Ida, which made landfall in southern Louisiana as a Category 4 storm on Sunday. Winds of over 150 miles an hour (240 kilometers/hour) destroyed buildings, bridges and knocked out New Orleans’ electric grid. Five days later, approximately one million people in Louisiana and Mississippi remain without power, and at least six people died.

Storms with heavy rainfalls, while not completely unprecedented in the northeastern United States, have become more intense and more common in the last few

years. Aiguo Dai, a professor of atmospheric science at the University at Albany at the State University of New York, told the *New York Times*: “Storm intensity is increasing much faster than the average change in precipitation. And it’s the intensity that really matters because that’s what we design our infrastructure to handle.”

Increased precipitation in a single rainfall is a feature of human-induced climate change. As the planet warms, the atmosphere contains more moisture which can fall in a single storm.

New York City’s Central Park measured the highest rainfall on record, 3.15 inches (8 cm) in an hour, on Wednesday night. This was far above the previous record of 1.94 inches (5 cm) during Tropical Storm Henri on August 21, a week and a half ago. Overall, nine inches (23 cm) of rain fell on many parts of New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Massachusetts. The Schuylkill River in Philadelphia reached levels not seen since the 1850s.

The destruction in the northeast caused by Ida follows a series of other climate-change related disasters this year, including the devastating wildfires in the western United States, the floods in Europe in July that killed more than 200 people, and the floods in China last month, when 8 inches (20 cm) of rain fell in one hour on Zhengzhou, capital of the Chinese province of Henan.

Scientists have warned for decades that climate change will lead to more frequent and extreme weather events, but governments throughout the world have rejected the emergency measures necessary to slow and reverse the process. Nothing, moreover, has been done to make roadways safe, secure housing from flooding or upgrade sewer systems that routinely overflow. Investments and repairs pledged by Democratic Party politicians in New York City after Superstorm Sandy nearly one decade ago have gone largely unfulfilled.

In a statement about the disaster, President Joe Biden said that “extreme storms and the climate crisis are here” and called it “one of the great challenges of our time.” Such statements, made after every disaster, mean nothing.

The necessary reduction in greenhouse gasses required to halt global warming requires massive changes in energy production on the basis of a globally coordinated and scientific plan. To protect millions of

workers throughout the world from the impact that climate change is already having requires an enormous diversion of social resources.

This type of transformation is incompatible with the capitalist system. It requires the transition to a planned, socialist economy on a world scale.

Over the past year, the ruling class has demonstrated that it is utterly incapable of responding to a global pandemic. The elementary measures necessary to eradicate the virus—social distancing, mass vaccination, a lockdown of schools and non-essential workplaces as well as support for workers who must stay home—have been rejected because they went against the interests of the financial oligarchy.

The same ruling class cannot and will not sanction the massive allocation of resources and infringements on profit required to address a threat to the very future of humanity itself. The fight against climate change is, as with every great social issue confronting the working class, a revolutionary question.



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