

Washington and Baltimore residents hit by near-record tidal flooding

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A major storm hit the Baltimore-Washington D.C. area on Friday, causing widespread flooding. Residents in low-lying areas faced knee-deep water, road closures, and power outages.

As late as Sunday, 14 million people were still under the impact of flood advisories and warnings. The National Weather Service (NWS) stated “up to one half foot of inundation above ground level in low lying areas” was possible “due to tidal flooding” in Harford County, Anne Arundel County, and DC. The three areas encompass a population of over 1.5 million people.

The NWS warned people to avoid travelling unnecessarily and to do what they can “to protect flood-prone property.” The advisories remain in effect until at least Monday morning when conditions are expected to improve.

Many buildings were undoubtedly damaged, but because the flooding lasted through the weekend, people have only just begun to take stock. The NWS issued a coastal flood warning for the areas surrounding the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River early on Friday. Maryland Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency for all the areas in Maryland under the coastal flood warning. Baltimore County announced nineteen road closures by Friday night, along with 10 downed trees blocking roads.

According to a local news report, the Baltimore Gas & Electric outage map showed over 200 outages on Friday night affecting roughly 5,000 customers. By Sunday afternoon there were still 38 active outages impacting hundreds of customers. In the Washington D.C. area, Pepco was still showing 10 active outages Sunday afternoon.

Ellicott City, a low-lying neighborhood outside of Baltimore, was spared the impact of this weekend’s

rains despite being hit with devastating floods several times in recent years. This was due to the majority of flooding coming not from inland rainfall that overwhelmed drainage systems and rivers, but storm surge which inundated coastal areas often only a few feet above sea level.

Meteorologists warned that the storm surge would produce record high tides and some of the worst flooding since Hurricane Isabel ravaged the region in 2003. This was confirmed by many residents who had not previously seen such extreme flooding. The high tides on Friday morning and evening came in at over four feet, compared to a usual height of between one and one-and-a-half feet, with little subsidence in between.

Entire neighborhoods were submerged, including Old Town Alexandria in Virginia, and Annapolis and the Inner Harbor of Baltimore in Maryland. Pictures circulated on social media showing shop fronts with several feet of water in front, and some residents paddling through streets in kayaks or canoes.

Flooding has increased in the area in recent years due to the growing effect of climate change. A warmer global temperature contributes to more frequent extreme weather events, like the storms which hit California last week and the remnants of Hurricane Ida which inundated New Jersey and New York City in August, drowning residents in their homes.

A *Baltimore Magazine* article from 2015 discussing the impact of sea level rise in the state notes, “[f]loods have increased by more than 900% in both cities since 1960. Some projections call for 225 or more such floods a year for Baltimore and essentially daily inundation for Annapolis by 2045.” The article circulated on social media Friday, with many noting somberly how the predictions made in the article are

beginning to come true.

As with the pandemic, capitalist governments are fundamentally incapable of responding to climate change or the extreme weather events which it is producing. The Glasgow COP26 summit that started this weekend holds nothing but empty promises for those hoping to address climate change while the Earth continues to warm. It is up to the international working class to transform the global economy in the interests of human life and put an end to global warming.



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