

Devastating flash floods in eastern Kentucky leave 16 dead, including 6 children

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At least 16 people have been killed in eastern Kentucky as a result of devastating flash flooding following torrential rainfall that began Wednesday evening and continued into Thursday morning. Kentucky's Democratic Governor Andy Beshear has declared a state of emergency and stated that he expects the death toll to reach as high as 30. Among the confirmed victims so far are six children.

Four siblings, Maddison Noble, 8, Riley Noble Jr., 6, Nevaeh Noble, 4, and Chance Noble, 2, were killed in Knott County when they were swept away by a rush of water after taking shelter with their parents in a tree.

"They got on the roof and the entire underneath washed out with them and the children. They managed to get to a tree and ... held the children a few hours before a big tide came and washed them all away at the same time," their cousin Brittany Trejo told the *Lexington Herald Leader*. "The mother and father was stranded in the tree for 8 hours before anyone got there to help."

Reacting to the scale of the devastation, Governor Beshear told the press, "In a word, this event is devastating, and I do believe it will end up being one of the most significant deadly floods that we have had in Kentucky in at least a very long time. We probably have not seen the worst of it. Sadly, we believe that we will lose Kentuckians, and a lot of Kentuckians will probably lose most of what they have.

"What we're going to see coming out of this is massive property damage. We expect a loss of life. Hundreds will lose their homes, and this is going to be yet another event that it's going to take not months but likely years for many families to rebuild and recover."

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), rain is expected to resume Sunday and carry on into Tuesday, threatening another wave of flooding and

further hampering rescue and recovery efforts.

Highlighting the already dilapidated state of infrastructure throughout the Appalachian region, Beshear declared that 25,000 homes and businesses were without power as of Thursday afternoon. Many areas are also without access to clean drinking water. This is all the more damning for Kentucky, which cites flooding as its "number one most frequent and costly disaster."

Over 200 displaced residents have been forced to seek shelter. However, with cases of the highly transmissible and immune-resistant BA.5 subvariant of COVID-19 exploding across the country, and states having abandoned all efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus, such shelters are more akin to potential death traps than refuges.

The Kentucky National Guard has been mobilized to assist with search and rescue operations. So far, around 20 to 30 residents have been airlifted to safety. The Tennessee and West Virginia National Guards have provided helicopters to help with rescues. An incident management team has also been dispatched from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The Biden administration issued a typically trite statement, which also managed to incorrectly place the flooding in the opposite end of the state. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters, "Our hearts go out to the people of the South, of South-Western Kentucky, which is experiencing considerable flash flooding that has taken the lives of multiple people."

While the entire region experienced heavy rainfall, the flooding mainly occurred in a predominantly rural and impoverished area near the borders of West Virginia and Virginia. Five counties—Floyd, Breathitt, Perry, Knott and Letcher—are reportedly the worst hit

areas.

Dustin Jordan, a National Weather Service (NWS) meteorologist in Jackson, Kentucky, reported that Knott County experienced 6.82 inches (17.3 cm) of rainfall over a two-day period, with Breathitt and Perry counties experiencing around 7 inches (17.8 cm).

The NWS also reported that the North Fork Kentucky River in Letcher County experienced record-breaking water levels. At 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, water levels were at 20.91 feet, over a six-foot increase from the previous record in 1957. In Breathitt County, the North Fork peaked at 43.47 feet by 2:00 a.m. Friday, a slight increase over the previous record of 43.1 feet.

According to US Census data, across the impacted counties the median household income in 2020 dollars ranges from \$29,538 to \$39,594, while the percentage of persons in poverty ranges from 22 percent to almost 30 percent, the outcome of decades of deindustrialization in the region. No doubt many residents are unable to afford flood insurance, which is separate from typical homeowners' insurance, forcing them to rely on federal assistance which Kentucky's Energy and Environment Cabinet admits "may be limited or unavailable after a flood occurs."

For decades scientists have been warning that human-induced climate change would create the conditions for more frequent and intensive extreme weather events. Developments over the past year have confirmed this. Just days ago, massive flooding ravaged through St. Louis, Missouri, leaving one dead and over 400 in need of rescue. Throughout June and July, a record heat wave has persisted across Europe, prompting wildfires and thousands of heat-related deaths. Last week, over 90 million people in the US from the Southern Plains into the East were under various heat advisories for dangerously high temperatures.

As with COVID-19, in order to protect the profit interests of the ruling class, capitalist governments around the world have refused to take the necessary steps to confront climate change. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the center of world capitalism, the United States, which has funneled trillions of dollars to the financial oligarchy and the bloated military apparatus while simultaneously pursuing "great power conflict" against Russia and China, threatening nuclear annihilation.

The only social force capable of waging a struggle

against climate change, war, fascism, social inequality and all the myriad crises produced by capitalism is the international working class, organized and imbued with the program and perspective of revolutionary socialism. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its Socialist Equality Parties around the world are the only organizations committed to this historic necessity.



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