

Death toll mounts from Hurricane Ian

Alex Johnson
30 September 2022

Dozens of deaths have been reported after Hurricane Ian slammed into the coast of Florida, with still more fatalities expected in the coming days from what officials are saying is the deadliest storm in Florida's history.

The National Weather Service announced Friday that Ian was being downgraded to post-tropical cyclone, which would bring heavy rain and potential flash flooding to parts of North and South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia through Saturday morning. Ian made landfall in South Carolina Friday morning, crashing into Georgetown as a Category 1, the first hurricane to hit the state since Matthew in 2016.

Although Ian declined in intensity, it remains a powerful storm, knocking out power thus far for an estimated 400,000 South Carolinians. The mayor of South Carolina's Pawley Island, Brian Henry, said Ian brought a surge that was "probably beyond what most people anticipated." Sidewalks and roads in the neighborhoods of Charleston, about 60 miles south of Georgetown, were flooded by the afternoon, and Ian reportedly sustained winds of about 85 mph.

The storm's northward path through the southeastern United States follows the devastating havoc it wrought on Florida this week as rescuers and police are uncovering many deaths found in the storm's wake, beside the destruction it caused for buildings and personal property. In Lee County, home to the barrier island of Cayo Costa, Sheriff Carmine Marceno revealed 16 storm-related deaths.

As of this writing, at least 42 deaths have been attributed to the storm after it battered Florida, according to reports from CNN, Governor Ron DeSantis, and deaths listed from various counties. The hard-hit city of Fort Myers reported that only about 15 percent of power was restored by Friday afternoon. It is a testament to the profit-driven priorities of the state and companies that most residents remain without

power and without any source of backup electricity.

Like all social disasters, Hurricane Ian has demonstrated the consequences of the denial of human-induced climate change and the subordination of all life to the dictates of lucrative profits. This is above all highlighted in the irrational development of Cape Coral, where the storm had a particularly devastating impact.

Despite the city being especially vulnerable to catastrophic weather events due to its position just above sea level, Florida's political officials and environmental agencies have permitted corporations to pour vast sums into the city to construct lavish housing and other infrastructure amenities. This includes the astonishing growth of canals and the draining of its low-lying swamps.

Cape Coral grew to one of the larger cities on the Gulf coast, rising from some 200 people in 1960 to about 180,000 in 2016.

The city's growth has been based on ecological disaster, as the canals came from the reckless and relentless digging into the region's landscape, ravaging its wetlands, estuaries, and aquifers. The abysmal lack of planning on the part of capitalist developers is reflected in its design, without water or sewer pipes, shops or offices, or anything except pre-platted residential lots.

The development of Cape Coral is one aspect of the massive growth of the Florida peninsula's population. For decades, the state's coastal areas were exploited as a profitable tourist destination and the center of its housing market, despite the state being greatly flood-prone and frequently affected by hurricanes and tropical storms. The state has spent some \$16 billion on development projects in the Everglades, a staggering sum compared to what it has expended for hurricane preparedness and evacuation procedures.

Six years after Hurricane Irma, Ian has exposed the

criminal negligence of state and federal authorities who for years saw no reason to reinforce the state's preparedness and provide financial assistance for those affected. Governor Ron DeSantis has said Friday some of the power grid in Lee and Charlotte counties was completely completely destroyed and that the Category 4 hurricane "uprooted some of the existing infrastructure" and that it would take 24 to 48 hours to fix the state's electrical grid. The actual timeframe could be much longer.

More than 1.6 million homes and businesses remain without power across the state while at least seven counties are reporting between 60% and 100% of their utility customers have no electricity. Outages stretching from Collier County towards the southern end of the state and to the northeast past Jacksonville. According to AccuWeather founder Joel Myers, the total damage and economic loss of Hurricane Ian will be between \$180 billion and \$210 billion. Homeowners and those residing in apartment complexes have seen their residences and vehicles either completely destroyed or severely damaged, and many are left without any substantial means to reimburse their losses.

The response of the Biden administration and the state government under Ron DeSantis has amounted to rhetorical statements with little effort to actually deliver relief for those affected by the widespread destruction of property. DeSantis, no doubt feeling mounting pressure and anger from his indifference leading up to the hurricane, has petitioned Biden for federal assistance while many have had to rely on charitable donations to stave off financial ruin.

DeSantis has spent his political career as a reactionary opponent of public expenditures for disaster relief and preparedness to burnish his credentials as a far-right figure willing to defend the wealth of the corporate elite at all costs. In 2013, he voted against a federal bailout for the New York region hit by Hurricane Sandy.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact