

State of emergency declared for Southern California as atmospheric river leads to flash floods, mudslides

Joshua Rodriguez
6 February 2024

Millions of Southern Californians are facing the onslaught of an “atmospheric river” this week of extraordinarily high levels of winds and rain. According to meteorologists, half a year’s worth of rain has already fallen in the area over the course of a five-day period.

This week’s rainfall thus far has created a wave of flooding, mudslides and environmental hazards. Three deaths have been reported so far, and this number is expected to rise.

The latest atmospheric river is also referred to as an example of the “Pineapple Express,” a recurring atmospheric river bringing moisture from the tropics near Hawaii to the US West Coast. Such regular meteorological phenomena are being drastically intensified through the influence of man-made climate change, which has been caused by the unrestrained emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in the pursuit of profit since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

California Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, declared a belated state of emergency Sunday in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura. This was despite the fact that meteorologists had warned of the approaching weather pattern several weeks prior.

The influx of wet weather has proven especially dangerous for fire-prone areas, where previous wildfires have made the environment fertile for flooding and mudslides which have encased residential homes, vehicles and other property in mud and water, leaving the occupants without a home and very little means to assess and fix the damage.

Speaking on the unfolding disaster, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said, “Just like our preparations for tropical storm Hilary paid off in August, I am confident we will weather this storm too because once again the city is prepared, we are sharing information, and I’m seeing Angelenos take action to make common sense preparations.

“If you are not home already, please get home and stay home. Stay off the roads. Make tonight a Sunday night dinner or family game night. Stay informed.”

Such precautions, however, were not to be extended to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation’s second largest. Only two of the district’s 900 campuses were closed Monday amid the severe weather.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, school buses were 30 minutes late on average with a power outage hitting one campus and lost phone service at four others. According to LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, classes would continue at full capacity on Tuesday regardless of any additional rainfall.

As of this writing, the National Weather Service predicts heavy rains throughout Monday night, clearing mid-morning Tuesday.

The largest impact thus far from the heavy rainfall has been a series of mudslides primarily in the numerous hillside communities found throughout the Southern California area. They have already caused life-altering damage to homes and property.

On Sunday night, several residents living in the Beverly Crest, Beverly Glen, Studio City, Baldwin Hills, La Habra and Sherman Oaks areas of Los Angeles reported that the ground gave way, sending mud and other debris into their homes and burying their

vehicles in a matter of seconds.

Several homes have been red tagged and deemed “uninhabitable” by local fire departments and city officials, with other residential areas being evacuated due to the danger that the continuing rain poses around the area.

The damage to homes and property, as well as the danger of physical injury or death, is not only limited to the Los Angeles area, as such events have become commonplace across the West Coast during the past few days.

There are also reports of heavy snowfall across the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascade mountains which border the California and Nevada region, and an avalanche in Lee Canyon, Nevada, with several residents reported missing.

These deteriorating conditions have led to hundreds of thousands without power and dozens of rescue missions launched for those trapped in homes and vehicles.

Such tragedies, however, were not only foreseeable but were foreseen and entirely preventable.

On both the state and federal levels, the ruling elite continues to redirect billions in funding into the coffers of Wall Street and the Pentagon, while starving disaster preparedness and infrastructure.

While the flash floods, earthquakes and wildfires plaguing the West Coast in particular all have natural causes, what has made these natural events all the more deadly is the refusal of the ruling class internationally to reallocate resources from war and austerity to a comprehensive plan to combat climate change and the climate disasters fueled by it.

The latest revised budget proposed by California Governor Gavin Newsom contains a total of \$492 million in flood response and preparedness, equivalent to \$12.54 for each of the state’s 39.24 million residents. To put this sum in a different perspective, \$492 million is just 0.46 percent of the \$105 billion in assets owned by the state’s richest individual, Larry Page, co-founder of Google.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)