

# At least 12 dead from Kentucky flood disaster

**Kevin Reed**  
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Historic flooding hit Kentucky over the weekend as severe storms brought heavy rainfall and strong winds since Friday. At least 12 people have lost their lives in the disaster, including a mother and her 7-year-old child.

Numerous cities and towns across the state were impacted by the deluge which caused flash floods, mudslides and significant damage. Flooding has been reported in more than 120 Kentucky counties while communities in Hart, Pike and Washington counties were submerged in water with thousands of people evacuating their homes.

More than 1,000 rescue operations were conducted by swift water boat teams and Kentucky National Guard soldiers. Ohio Task Force 1, an urban search and rescue team operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), has also been activated for extended rescue operations spanning Kentucky and surrounding states.

Power was cut to approximately 15,000 households and more than 17,000 homes lacked access to clean water. Officials report water is still rising in some areas and at least 300 roads across Kentucky are experiencing severe flooding or are completely closed. Residents have been warned not to drive as many of the deaths have been caused by auto-related accidents.

The National Weather Service (NWS) said the areas with at least moderate flooding included the Kentucky River, Rolling Fork River, Green River and Rough River.

At 6 p.m. on Monday, WLWT5 TV reported:

Downtown Hazard, Kentucky, is seeing some of the worst flooding in decades as waters got nearly six feet deep in businesses along Main Street. "It was a mess. Everything was floated. The stuff from the kitchen cabinets was out here

in the lobby when you walked in," said attorney Kevin Johnson.

Everything that was inside his law offices was carried outside, right down to the flooring. Now, covered in mud and piled up to be taken to the dump. The flood waters made it from his doorstep to nearly six feet deep inside within the span of about an hour.

"It's a nightmare. We have to start all over, and I'll have to try to recreate all my clients' files. Probably, roughly 100 or more clients. This is starting over," Johnson said.

Johnson got some help on the cleanup from the Hazard football team. About 15 players showed up to help clean up including his son who is on the team. "It looks like a dumpster, is what it looks like," said Hazard football player Chris Partin. "Not only do we come together on the field. We come together off the field too."

WSAZ-TV reported that a woman and her 7-year-old child died on Saturday night after their vehicle was swept away by flash flooding in Hart County. County Coroner Tony Roberts said rescue teams responded near Bacon Creek in an effort to rescue the mother and child.

"As she was going to pick her husband up at some family members' so they could go home, she got turned around, took a wrong turn and went the wrong way and ended up on the bridge," Roberts said.

While they were able to recover the child's body from the vehicle, rising waters and lack of daylight forced the crews to halt their rescue efforts. "We could not get to the mom because the water was coming up so fast," Roberts said. EMTs on scene attempted to revive the child but were unsuccessful.

The recovery effort was resumed Sunday morning

and the teams retrieved the mother's body and vehicle. The mother has been identified as Amy Philpot of Vine Grove. The child's name has not yet been released.

According to the Clay County Coroner's Office, 73-year-old Donald Keith Nicholson, of Manchester, was driving through floodwaters when he stopped and exited his vehicle and was then swept away by rushing water. He was pronounced dead around 7:30 p.m. on Saturday after his body was recovered in a flooded ditch in the Horse Creek area of Clay County.

Pike County in the eastern part of Kentucky was especially hard hit. Residents had evacuated to Pikeville High School as their designated emergency shelter on Saturday night but after about an hour, they were forced to evacuate to Pike Central High School.

Residents reported that water was inside Pikeville High School on Sunday morning and, after it receded, a thick coat of mud was left behind. Half of the football field was underwater. Shopping centers on the north side of town were swamped Sunday afternoon. A car in front of E-Z Pay Auto was almost completely submerged.

The US Geological Survey publishes a WaterWatch Streamflow Map and, as of this writing, the map showed 116 floods in the region of which 5 were major, 23 moderate and 88 minor. Another 67 areas were near-flood stage.

The rains in Kentucky began on Friday night and continued into Saturday, dropping 7 inches of water according to NWS, quickly resulting in rivers and streams overflowing their banks. Meanwhile, the snowfall that had previously fallen and covered most of the state melted in the rain, adding to the deluge.

One climate change disaster after another has pounded Kentucky over the last four years, including tornadoes, mudslides and floods. Flooding in eastern Kentucky has killed more than 50 people since 2021 and tornadoes on the western side of the state left 80 dead in December 2022.

Researchers at the University of Kentucky (UK) have said that increasing amounts of rain and snow are overwhelming the region's moist, thin soil type that is unable to absorb all the excess water. Streams and rivers are more likely to overflow and in flat areas, the water pools and causes floods.

As the severity and frequency of extreme weather events continues to increase, driven by capitalist-fueled

global warming, little to nothing is being done by the political establishment to address them. Following the devastating floods in eastern Kentucky in 2022 in which 45 people were killed—the deadliest non-tropical storm event in the US since the 1970s—UK researchers studied the event to understand what happened and to develop plans and prevention measures.

With an award of \$1.1 million from the US National Science Foundation (NSF), principal investigator Christopher Barton, a professor of forest hydrology and watershed management, said last October, "We want to do everything we can as scientists and engineers to build up the infrastructure to understand, predict and prepare for flash floods in this region."

"Rural communities, especially those in the economically disadvantaged Appalachian region, are particularly vulnerable to flash floods. To best help, we also must understand how climate change and landscape alterations affect flash floods."

Barton is working on a four-year project to study flash flooding in small headwater streams in Appalachia and apply the findings to develop better early warning systems that help people evacuate their homes and communities in advance of catastrophic flooding.

These underfunded scientific efforts are an urgent matter and, with anti-science climate deniers now occupying the White House, the future funding of such initiatives are under attack. After the NSF was subject to an 8 percent funding cut in the last year of the Biden administration, it has been widely reported that President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are seeking to gut the federal agency and lay off half its staff.



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