

Devastation and death in wake of Hurricane Irma

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. — Florida residents struggling to put their lives back together in Hurricane Irma's wake fell victim to new hazards, including oppressive heat, brush-clearing accidents, house fires and deadly fumes from generators.

Five residents of a Hollywood nursing home that lost power in the storm died, authorities said Wednesday. They gave no immediate details on the cause. Police and fire crews began evacuating Rehabilitation Center at Hollywood Hills after the deaths there.

In the Miami area, a Coral Gables apartment building was evacuated after authorities determined a lack of power made it unsafe for elderly tenants, while officers arrived at the huge Century Village retirement community in Pembroke Pines to help people on upper floors without access to working elevators. More than half the community of 15,000 residents lacked power.

Also, at least five people died and more than a dozen were treated for breathing carbon monoxide fumes from generators in the Orlando, Miami and Daytona Beach areas.

Aside from the nursing home deaths, at least 13 people in Florida were killed in Irma-related circumstances, in some cases during the cleanup, well after the storm. A Tampa man died after the chainsaw he was using to remove branches kicked back and cut his carotid artery.

Elsewhere, Irma was blamed for four deaths in South Carolina and two in Georgia. At least 37 people were killed in the Caribbean.

In the battered Florida Keys, meanwhile, county officials pushed back against a preliminary estimate from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that 25 percent of all homes in the Keys were destroyed and nearly all the rest were heavily damaged.

"Things look real damaged from the air, but when you clear the trees and all the debris, it's not much damage to the houses," said Monroe County Commissioner

Heather Carruthers.

The Keys felt Irmay's full fury when the hurricane roared in on Sunday with 130 mph (209 kph) winds.

President Donald Trump's homeland security adviser, Tom Bossert, said the federal government was working to help Florida Keys residents secure shelter through rental assistance, hotels or pre-manufactured housing. Trump plans to visit Florida on Thursday.

Bossert told Fox News that during his visit, Trump "is going to make sure the troops that he's put in place are doing their job and then to thank those folks that have been working around the clock."

Irma's economic toll on Florida already includes nearly \$250 million in preparation and recovery expenses by 31 state agencies. And agriculture officials warily eyed storm damage to citrus crops.

The number of people without electricity in the steamy late-summer heat dropped to 9.5 million — just under half of Florida's population. Utility officials warned it could take 10 days or more for power to be fully restored. About 110,000 people remained in shelters across the state.

While nearly all of Florida was engulfed by the massive storm, the Keys — home to about 70,000 people — appeared to be the hardest hit. Drinking water and power were cut off, all three of the islands' hospitals were closed, and gasoline was extremely limited.

Search-and-rescue teams made their way into the more distant reaches of the Keys, and an aircraft carrier was positioned off Key West to help. Officials said it was not known how many people ignored evacuation orders and stayed behind in the Keys.

Crews also worked to repair two washed-out, 300-foot (90-meter) sections of U.S. 1, the sole highway that runs through the Keys, and check the safety of the 42 bridges linking the islands.

The Lower Keys were still off-limits, with a roadblock in place where the highway was washed out.

On the mainland, one of the evacuees taken from an apartment building that lacked power near Miami was a 97-year-old woman who is immobile and has heart problems.

Five firefighters went up the dark emergency stairwell in the Coral Gables building, strapped Cuban-born Ofelia Carrillo to a special evacuation chair and carried her down. Her daughter Madeleine Alvarez said they ultimately heeded firefighters' instructions, despite doctors warning of her mother's fragile state.

"This is the most stressful situation I've lived in my life," Alvarez said.

Dearen reported from the Keys. Associated Press writers Gary Fineout and Joe Reedy in Tallahassee; Jay Reeves in Immokalee; Terrance Harris in Orlando; Claire Galofaro in Jacksonville; and Jennifer Kay, Freida Frisaro, Curt Anderson and David Fischer in Miami contributed to this report.

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