

Catastrophic flooding in Tennessee leaves at least 22 dead and 50 missing

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The number of those who have died or are missing is continuing to climb in the wake of the catastrophic flash flooding, which took place over the weekend throughout Middle Tennessee. According to current figures, 22 people have lost their lives—including several children and two seven-month-old twins—while at least 50 remain missing. Damage estimates have yet to be calculated but are likely to be in the many millions of dollars.

Humphreys County, a largely rural area located a little over an hour west of Nashville, was hit with 17 inches of rain in less than 24 hours, far surpassing the previous state record from 1982 of 13.6 inches that occurred in Milan, Tennessee. Other counties that were severely impacted include Dickson (13.76 inches), Hickman (10.71 inches) and Houston (9.9 inches).

Images of the aftermath show what appears to be a warzone, with homes and businesses decimated, overturned vehicles (some of which came to rest vertically) and various other debris. Many roads and bridges were damaged and remain inaccessible. Communication networks were also damaged, leaving residents unable to get in touch with friends and loved ones, and hampering the capabilities of the multiple agencies presently engaged in rescue efforts.

A low-income housing area in Waverly, Tennessee in Humphreys County was especially hard hit, with dozens of buildings damaged or destroyed, and with residents “pulling out bodies of people who had drowned and didn’t make it out,” as one witness told the AP.

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee viewed the devastation in Waverly on Sunday. “The loss of life and property damage is devastating,” Lee told reporters. “Our hearts are with the many Tennesseans experiencing loss and heartbreak.”

In a report published by the Associated Press (AP), one resident, who discovered that one of her friends had perished in the flooding, approached the governor and told him, “I thought I was over the shock of all this. I’m just tore up over my friend. My house is nothing, but my friend is gone.” Another account details a resident forced to stand helpless on a bridge while witnessing two young girls and their dog sweeping past clinging to a wooden board.

Many have begun posting on Humphreys County Sheriff’s Office Facebook page in hopes of locating friends and loved ones who remain missing.

Humphreys County has a population of nearly 19,000, with some 2,500 living in poverty. The median household income, in 2019 dollars, is \$45,667, well below the national median. Geographically, the entirety of the county’s western border is defined by the Tennessee River, into which numerous streams and creeks flow throughout the county. Given the proximity to such a major waterway, it is not a matter of if a disaster like this will strike, but when.

Moreover, the state itself is frequently visited by extreme weather events, including tornadoes, heat waves and cold fronts, in addition to routine flooding. The year 2020 was especially difficult. In addition to the impact of the pandemic, a tornado which ripped through Nashville and the surrounding area took the lives of 25 people and cost millions in damages. In 2010, the Cumberland River flood, a so-called 1,000-year flood, submerged huge swaths of Nashville, causing over \$2 billion in private property damage and \$128 million in public infrastructure damage, with 26 people losing their lives, including one man whose body was located five months after the flood.

As recently explained by the *World Socialist Web Site*, extreme weather events are not merely natural

disasters. The increasing frequency and severity of these events is primarily the result of human-induced climate change. Just as with the threat of pandemics, scientists have been warning for decades about the dangers facing humanity as a result of climate change. The refusal and inability of the ruling capitalist class to take any measures to address this issue is further proof that this social layer is unfit to rule society.

The latest disaster in Tennessee, as well as the myriad natural disasters which have taken place so far this year throughout the US and internationally and those to come, far from being “natural” and unavoidable are entirely preventable. However, this requires the harnessing of humanity’s enormous technological capabilities on a global scale. The barrier to this is the capitalist system itself, which subordinates all social need, including the infrastructure necessary to manage and mitigate natural disasters, to the interests of profit.



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