

Extent of destruction from Hurricane Milton comes to light

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Five days after Hurricane Milton made landfall at the barrier island Siesta Key near Sarasota, Florida, the deadly and devastating impact of the powerful climate change-fueled storm is coming to light in counties from the state's Gulf Coast to the Atlantic.

At least 23 people have been confirmed killed by the storm, which intensified at an unprecedented rate to a Category 5 hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico after first striking Florida as a Category 3 in the evening of October 9. Bringing 120 mile per hour winds, torrential rains and dozens of tornadoes, Milton ravaged Florida while residents were still recovering from Hurricane Helene less than two weeks earlier.

The storm flooded neighborhoods, destroyed homes, tipped over trucks, tossed boats around and destroyed the roof of Tropicana Field, a baseball stadium that was planned to be used as a shelter for first responders who were in the area to help rescue those trapped in the flooding.

Power was knocked out for millions of Floridians, and Poweroutage.us reports that over 275,000 customers remain without power around the Tampa Bay region as of this writing, including those in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee and Sarasota counties.

In Hillsborough County, first responders rescued more than 700 people, including 135 elderly people who were trapped in waist-deep water at a Tampa assisted living facility, where many had been relocated from an evacuation zone.

In one instance, Hillsborough County officers rescued a 14-year-old boy, who was floating on a piece of fence and pulled him into their boat.

Flooding has not receded in many impacted areas in central and northern Florida, where the storm dropped 5 to 20 inches of rain in a few hours. Rivers are expected to remain above flood stage for weeks or months due to

the relatively flat topographical features of the Florida peninsula. It will take weeks or months for the water to run off back into the ocean.

Some areas have been completely transformed by the storm. Accuweather reported that drone footage shows, for example, that the small coastal town of Grove City, Florida, located 30 miles south of where Milton made landfall, has been rendered unrecognizable.

Other areas severely damaged by the storm include Sanibel and Captiva Islands. Fox Forecast Center meteorologist Cody Braud told the *New York Post*, "As storms like Milton move ashore, they're pumping sand and water much further inland than what we're used to. But because there's been so much storm surge, as things start to recede, everything starts to reverse and get pushed back out."

The US Geological Survey warned, "This is the most severe level of coastal change" and said that Hurricane Milton joined a long list of destructive storms that have changed the Florida coastline, including Hurricanes Ian, Irma, Matthew and Michael.

In eastern Florida where the Hurricane Milton exited into the Atlantic Ocean, Canaveral National Seashore is closed until further notice to protect visitors. Most of the boardwalk at Playlinda Beach was damaged, and the beach suffered significant dune erosion and overwash, the National Park Service reported.

President Joe Biden made a perfunctory visit to Florida on Sunday which included an aerial tour of areas impacted by the hurricane. He landed in Tampa after receiving an "operational briefing" from federal, state and local authorities. The president then flew to St. Pete Beach on a barrier island west of St. Petersburg, where he made comments to the press.

While millions of people's lives have been turned upside down by the storms, Biden made the comment,

“Thankfully, the storm’s impact was not as cataclysmic as had—we had predicted.”

The president presented a paltry \$612 million for what he called “six cutting-edge projects to support communities impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton,” under conditions where the property damage and economic losses from Milton alone are estimated at between \$160 and \$180 billion.

Meanwhile, the funding the White House is making available is not going to families who have lost everything in the storms. Instead, Biden said the money would go to the energy corporations in the region, including “\$47 million for Gainesville Regional Utilities and another \$47 million for Florida Power & Light.”

Public health officials in Florida are warning residents of an increased risk of life-threatening bacterial infections from remaining flood waters. Meanwhile, stagnant water creates a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes and the spread of diseases such as dengue, Zika, malaria and West Nile virus.

As Imelda Moise, a geography professor at the University of Miami, told *Newsweek*, “Hurricanes and extreme weather events can significantly affect mosquito populations. For instance, hurricanes can lead to an explosion in mosquito numbers due to the creation of ideal breeding conditions from increased rainfall, elevated humidity, and nutrient-rich floodwaters.”

While nearly 65,000 residents of Rutherford County, North Carolina, were working to clear mud and debris left behind by Hurricane Helene, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) crews were forced to relocate this weekend due to a reported armed threat against workers.

As the *Washington Post* reported late Sunday, FEMA was ordered to evacuate from Rutherford County on Saturday due to a reported threat. An official with the US Forest Service said the National Guard “had come across x2 trucks of armed militia saying there were out hunting FEMA.”

The *Post* report also said that earlier in the day, “a resident threatened FEMA personnel in a trailer in the same county, according to two volunteers with Cajun Navy, a relief organization.” Others reported that people had been harassing federal employees who were delivering aid to the area, saying they did not want the

help.

Representative Chuck Edwards, a Republican from North Carolina, told MSNBC on Sunday that “we had two counties [where] folks reported different militia groups attacking and threatening FEMA.”

Later, the North Carolina National Guard reportedly said it had no actual reports of encountering militia, though authorities in the state arrested William Jacob Parsons, 44, Saturday and charged him in connection with alleged threats made against FEMA.

The Rutherford County Sheriff’s Office in North Carolina arrested Parsons for allegedly threatening harm to FEMA employees, who were responding to Hurricane Helene. He was arrested and charged with a misdemeanor for “going armed to the terror of the public,” according to Sheriff Captain Jamie Keever in a news release issued on Monday. Keever said, “Parsons was armed with a handgun and a rifle.”

A *Post* report on Monday said, “It’s now the second time in a month that a Trump-fueled conspiracy theory has preceded apparent threats made in the relevant area—the last one being Trump’s false claims about Haitian migrants stealing and eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. Each time, local Republican officials have sought to combat the conspiracy theories and warned of the harm they could do.”



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