

# Hurricane Matthew kills 19 in southeastern US

By Shelley Connor  
10 October 2016

After killing at least 800 people and displacing some 60,000 in Haiti last week, Hurricane Matthew battered the southeastern US, pelting coastal areas with torrential rains and winds of 120 mph in some areas claiming at least 19 lives.

Although Matthew only made one official landfall in the US—at McClellanville, South Carolina on October 8—it wrought significant damage in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia before being downgraded to a post-tropical cyclone on Sunday, October 9. Analysts have estimated insured property loss at \$6 billion or more.

Many of the 19 were killed as they attempted to ride out the storm in inadequate shelter. Two elderly residents of Florida succumbed to medical emergencies as they waited for first responders who could not reach them in the high waters. Five people remain missing in North Carolina.

As of publication at least 2.2 million households are without power throughout the Southeast. South Carolina reported 768,856 outages. In North Carolina, 670,716 remain without power. Florida still reports 561,862 outages, and Georgia reported 205,220 power outages.

St. Augustine, Florida experienced some of Matthew's first significant damage in the US. Over half of the city's population was trapped by rising waters as Matthew pummeled the city on October 7. Storm surge from the Atlantic combined with relentless rain and an aging municipal storm sewage system, filling the streets with dirty water and heaving boats onto dry land. The storm felled power lines and trees, which complicated efforts to evacuate trapped residents.

In Georgia, a wheelchair-bound man was killed when his home, which he had been unable to evacuate, was

struck by trees. Ten miles of Interstate 95 were closed throughout the weekend. US Highway 80 from Savannah to Tybee Island was also closed because of downed trees and power lines, as were several state and county highways in Evans County. Storm Surge on Tybee Island reached 12.5 feet, breaking a record set by Hurricane David in 1979.

A homeless woman in downtown Savannah was forced to struggle through water that sometimes reached her neck on Saturday. Her nine children had been evacuated, but she could not go with them; instead, she huddled under an overpass that crossed the low-lying area of her camp.

In North Carolina and South Carolina, record flooding soaked coastal cities. Over 50 water rescues were conducted in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where 12 inches of rain fell within 24 hours. Over 886 people statewide had to be rescued from the rising water, including eight people who were rescued from rooftops by helicopter. Tar Heel, North Carolina received 16 inches of rain over the weekend, while Goldsboro received 15, and Fayetteville received 12.

North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory warned residents that coastal rivers would not peak until Monday or Tuesday; "Our models show very, very dangerous conditions as those rivers go over their edges," he stated at a news conference.

Four sections of Interstate 95, a major north-south route in North Carolina, remain closed, along with many local roads. Governor McCrory asked North Carolina's coastal residents to avoid going out unnecessarily, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) urged residents returning to their homes to exercise caution over the next 48 hours. FEMA warned that downed power lines could charge flood waters, creating electrocution

hazards, and that moving water could sweep away pedestrians and cars.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina Public Works Director Lance Norris stated that cleanup was “just beginning,” and warned residents that trees, debris, and water damage would have to be assessed throughout the coming week. Traffic lights at crucial intersections were being powered by generators throughout Sunday.

Matthew was the first hurricane to make landfall in South Carolina since Hurricane Gaston in 2004. Matthew hit McClellanville, 40 miles northeast of Charleston.

Charleston avoided the brunt of Matthew’s destruction, as the storm weakened to a Category 1 hurricane, but the city still suffered a six-foot storm surge, severe floods, fallen trees, and power outages.

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley reported on Sunday that, although evacuation orders had been lifted for many coastal residents, they remained in effect for residents in Beaufort, Georgetown, Horry and Jasper Counties.

The threat posed by Matthew continues, despite the fact that it has been downgraded and is moving away from the coast. Waters continue to stand or even rise in many Southeastern cities, and thousands of people are still unable to return to their homes.

The number of lives lost to the storm could still rise. Infrastructure ranging from power lines to highways to sewage systems has been damaged. In many cases, as in St. Augustine, outdated infrastructure contributed to the damage inflicted by the hurricane.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**<http://www.wsws.org>**