

Death toll rises in Kentucky flooding as rescue efforts continue

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Louisville, July 30 (RHC)-- The U.S. states of Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia have issued emergency declarations and deployed search and rescue amid flooding.

At least 16 people have been confirmed dead from record flooding in eastern Kentucky, where the death toll is expected to rise as search and rescue teams look for missing people from communities washed away by the waters.

“The tough news is 16 confirmed fatalities now, and folks that’s going to get a lot higher,” Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said during a Friday briefing.

Powerful floodwaters swallowed towns that hug creeks and streams in Appalachian valleys and hollows, swamping homes and businesses, trashing vehicles in useless piles and crushing runaway equipment and debris against bridges. Mudslides marooned people on steep slopes and at least 33,000 customers were without power.

“Everybody out there that is scared, that can’t get in touch with one of their relatives. Cell phones are down in so many of these regions,” the governor said. “We will try to connect as many people as possible.” Search and rescue teams had rescued at least 294 people, with more than 100 airlifted from affected areas by the National Guard, the governor said.

U.S. President Joe Biden has approved Beshear’s request for a disaster declaration in the state to release federal funds to aid in rescue and rebuilding.

Some of the areas most severely affected suffer from high levels of poverty, and Beshear predicted it will take more than a year to recover from the damage.

Rain continued to fall in the region Friday. Flood warnings and watches remained in effect throughout the day for the eastern half of the state as well as northeast Tennessee and western West Virginia, where more rainfall was expected to swell waterways that were already well above their flood stages, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

Rivers across the region were expected to crest throughout the weekend while the risk of more dangerous flash flooding remained possible again throughout the day, the NWS said.

Emergency declarations have been issued in Virginia and West Virginia, and rescue teams in those states have been deployed to assist people in areas where flooding has cut off road access. Power outages across Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky have affected more than 33,000 people, according to Poweroutage.us.

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