

13 dead as flooding hits southwestern France

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Bridges and roads collapsed as flash floods swamped towns around the fortress city of Carcassonne in southern France

At least 13 people died when violent rainstorms turned rivers into raging torrents in southwest France on Monday, prompting some of the deadliest flooding in years, officials said.

The equivalent of three months of rainfall was dumped overnight in the Aude region in just a few hours, swelling rivers and flooding fields and towns, officials added.

President Emmanuel Macron's office said he would visit the affected areas "as soon as possible," while Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who is also the acting interior minister, was headed to the Aude region later Monday.

The rescue operations also appear to have postponed an expected announcement on a government reshuffle, prompted by the sudden resignation of interior minister Gerard Collomb nearly two weeks ago.

One of the overnight victims was an 88-year-old nun who was swept from her room by floodwaters at the Burning Bush priory in the village of Villardonnell, north of the fortress city of Carcassonne.

"The water crashed through the building's main door and on through the door to her room, the lowest in the convent. It carried away her furniture which ended up on the veranda," said Sister Irene, the mother superior.

The nun's body was later found under trees outside the convent.



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Elsewhere, flash floods overturned cars, ripped up streets and battered buildings and bridges, especially to the north of Carcassonne where authorities ordered bridges closed because of the rising Aude river.

Authorities rushed hundreds of firemen and half a dozen helicopters to the region to help with [rescue operations](#), particularly in the floodplain of the Aude river which hit its highest level in 100 years, according to the Vigicrues flood agency.

"There's water everywhere in the house. Everything is flooded," Helene Segura told AFP by telephone from the hard-hit village of Villegailhenc,

where at least one small bridge had collapsed.

"When I look out the window, I can only see water and mud everywhere. It's sad when you're 70 years old like me and you need to redo your house, change the furniture and all the upholstery," she said.



Some 600 firefighters rushed to help evacuate residents

Hundreds evacuated

In the town of Trebes, near Carcassonne, the water in the Aude rose eight metres (26 feet) in just five hours, officials said.

In total nine residents died in the city, which made headlines earlier this year after a jihadist attacker killed four people in a shooting spree, including a police officer who took the place of a hostage.

Two more died in Villegailhenc, and one in Villalier.

Around 1,000 people were evacuated in the area of Pezens, also near Carcassonne, amid fears that a nearby dam could burst.



Map of southwestern France showing flood-hit areas

The storms were triggered when a front of warm and humid air from the Mediterranean Sea slammed into colder air around the Massif Central

mountain range, inundating an area from the eastern Pyrenees to Aveyron further north.

This well-known weather pattern occurs three to six times a year in the region and nearly always triggers flash flooding.

But the French weather forecasting service, Météo France, suggested these episodes had recently become more frequent and more severe.

An unrelated storm on Sunday also hit Portugal, leaving 28 people with minor injuries and hundreds of thousands without power amid flooding in the region around the capital Lisbon.

The heavy rains, which later rolled on through Spain, were the tail end of hurricane Leslie in the Atlantic, which weakened to a post-tropical storm as it made landfall.

Last week, another weather system moving across the Mediterranean left 12 people dead on the Spanish island of Majorca as well as two people in southeast France.



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Authorities also rushed in helicopters to assist with rescue operations

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