

Hundreds evacuated as 'frightening' floods hit New Zealand

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Emergency personnel working in floodwaters from the overflowing Maitai River.

Hundreds of families on New Zealand's South Island were forced to leave their homes on Thursday after dramatic flooding prompted a state

of emergency in three regions.

A tropically fuelled storm has dumped more than 30 centimetres (11 inches) of rain on parts of the South Island, causing rivers to burst their banks. The [extreme weather](#) has also felled trees, blocking major roads.

A state of emergency was declared Wednesday in Buller, on the [west coast](#), and Nelson—where 233 homes have been evacuated after a month's worth of rain fell in just 15 hours.

The deluge transformed Nelson's main river, the Maitai, into a torrent—flooding houses, exposing pipes and leaving streets knee-deep in water.

City mayor Rachel Reese described the flash flooding as a "one-in-100-year event" as search and rescue teams, plus [military personnel](#), helped people on submerged streets.

Reese warned locals to treat all water as contaminated, because some sewers had broken.

Nelson resident Sam Lagrutta said the situation was "frightening" after police gave him just five minutes to leave his home.

"I literally just grabbed a carry-on bag and filled it with my passport, wallet and anything important I could find," he told the New Zealand Herald.

A further 160 households along the South Island's west coast were also asked to evacuate.

Buller has been repeatedly hit by flooding in recent years.



A submerged car stricken by the Maitai River.

Mayor Jamie Cleine said frequent evacuations had taken a toll on a community, which was now bracing for more flooding.

"It is extremely troubling for people financially and mentally. This is our reality until a long-term solution can be put in place," he told news site Stuff.

The country's Emergency Management Minister Kieran McAnulty visited Nelson on Thursday, promising financial aid to the flood-ravaged town.

"The weather has caused considerable damage and been extremely disruptive," he told reporters.

"While it's too early to know the full cost of the damage, this initial \$200,000 (US\$125,460) contribution will help... in getting immediate support to those who need it."

New Zealand's North Island has also been affected by the wild weather, with winds of up to 120 kilometres an hour barrelling across Northland, where three people were injured in a [car accident](#) after a tree fell on State Highway One.

Last month, New Zealand was soaked by its wettest July on record, and the wild weather looks set to continue until the weekend.

The country's largest insurer, IAG, has said building in flood-prone areas must stop.

Climate change is having an enormous impact on New Zealand's insurance sector. Ten major floods in the past two years have led to total losses of around \$400 million, IAG said.

About one percent of New Zealand's homes—20,000 properties—are at risk of flooding.

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