

Florida floods: Airport reopens as residents clean up mess

April 14 2023, by FREIDA FRISARO and TERRY SPENCER



James Richard and Katherine Arroyo trudge through the water in Hollywood, Fla., on April 13, 2023. Over 25 inches of rain fell in South Florida since Monday, causing widespread flooding. Credit: Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP, File

Fort Lauderdale's airport reopened Friday morning, two days after an

unprecedented deluge left planes and travelers stranded, as residents in the city's hardest hit neighborhoods began the slow process of cleaning up the mess left behind.

Officials at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport completed final inspections after sunrise Friday and resumed operations at 9 a.m.

In a tweet Friday morning, [airport officials advised travelers](#) to check with their airlines on updated [flight schedules](#) before going to the airport.

The airport shut down Wednesday evening as a storm dumped more than 2 feet (60 centimeters) of rain.

"Nature has been unkind to us," Broward County Mayor Lamar Fisher said during a news conference Thursday afternoon at the airport.

While it started raining on Monday in South Florida, much of the water fell Wednesday, and the Fort Lauderdale area saw record rainfall amounts in a matter of hours, ranging from 15 inches (38 centimeters) to 26 inches (66 centimeters).

In Fort Lauderdale's Edgewood neighborhood on Friday morning, the water level had receded about a foot from Thursday but was still up to 2 feet (.6 meters) deep in some spots as residents tried to clean up.

Newlywed Tatiana Rodriguez pointed to the spot a foot above the floor where the water rose inside the one-room rental she shares with her husband, Joseph. The patio they share with other boarders and use to enter their home remained underwater, and trash from throughout the neighborhood collected there.



A man walks with a bucket on a flooded street, Friday, April 14, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. South Florida has begun draining streets and otherwise cleaning up after an unprecedented storm that dumped upward of 2 feet of rain in a matter of hours. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

Tatiana, a hotel worker from Colombia, and her husband, a restaurant kitchen assistant from New York, have no electricity to power their [air conditioning](#), small microwave or tiny refrigerator.

The bridal tiara from their marriage last month is still hanging on the headboard of their bed. When the water started gushing into their home Wednesday night, they went outside and found foot-high cinder blocks that they used to prop the bed up.

"The only thing we think about is, 'Save the bed,' because if we don't have the bed we will have to leave," Tatiana Rodriguez said as she swept debris. "We are lucky because we can stay."

Nearby, yacht deckhand Sawyer Canale trudged through the water with his two South African houseguests, Fran Human and Dominic Linda.

Canale, who moved to Edgewood last week, said he was lucky because his house sits on a tiny hill, keeping the water inches from seeping inside. But the trio was surrounded on all sides by flooding.



United Airlines planes parked at Terminal 1 gates in anticipation of operations resuming at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on Friday, April

14, 2023. The airport was closed late Wednesday after torrential rains caused major flooding across South Florida. Credit: Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP

"I can't complain—all of my stuff is dry," Canale said. "But everything around us is wet."

"It is not the vacation we expected," Human deadpanned.

Hayden Wooster has spent two days driving Edgewood's streets in his large pickup truck, helping people get to and from their homes. He said he was able to help two people with medical devices leave their home after firefighters in a small boat couldn't, and also helped a family with two disabled daughters to evacuate.

"Grabbed them, grabbed their wheelchairs and got them to the hotel," said Wooster, an attorney.

Airlines were forced to cancel more than 650 flights at the Fort Lauderdale airport on Thursday, according to FlightAware.com.

Southwest canceled about 50 departures through Friday morning, a spokesperson said. The airline is letting customers rebook on flights to and from Miami and Palm Beach at no additional charge, she said.



A man carries his golf bag and shoes through a flooded neighborhood Friday, April 14, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. South Florida has begun draining streets and otherwise cleaning up after an unprecedented storm that dumped upward of 2 feet of rain in a matter of hours. Gov. Ron DeSantis issues a state of emergency for Broward County, which sustained the worst flooding in decades. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

Frontier Airlines moved two flights from Fort Lauderdale to Miami but canceled about 15 other round trips, a spokesperson said. Allegiant Air also canceled some flights and rerouted others to the Tampa, Orlando and Punta Gorda areas.

On Fort Lauderdale Beach, the three-day [Tortuga Music Festival](#) kicks off Friday afternoon, headlined by Eric Church, Kenny Chesney, Jake

Owen and Shania Twain. The "rain or shine" event left many ticketholders out of luck once the airport closed.

One of them is Amber Borkoski of Baltimore, Maryland, who purchased festival tickets six months ago and had planned to travel to Fort Lauderdale on Thursday to celebrate her friend's birthday.

On Wednesday night, her friend got caught up in the flash flooding while driving home from work in Fort Lauderdale.

"I started reaching out to the festival asking what the plan was first thing Thursday morning after I saw all the damage done to the city," Borkoski said. Then Southwest canceled her Thursday night flight from Baltimore to Fort Lauderdale, and festival officials told her that no refunds were available.



Delta Airline passengers line up in Terminal 2 in anticipation of operations resuming at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on Friday, April 14, 2023. The airport was closed late Wednesday after torrential rains caused major flooding across South Florida. Credit: Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP



Claudia Rodriguez assess water damage to a neighbor's home, Friday, April 14, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. South Florida has begun draining streets and otherwise cleaning up after an unprecedented storm that dumped upward of 2 feet of rain in a matter of hours. Gov. Ron DeSantis issues a state of emergency for Broward County, which sustained the worst flooding in decades. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier



Tatiana Lizarazo Rodriguez takes a break from cleaning the flooded room she shares with her newlywed husband, Friday, April 14, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. South Florida has begun draining streets and otherwise cleaning up after an unprecedented storm that dumped upward of 2 feet of rain in a matter of hours. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier



United Airlines and Silver Airways passengers line up in Terminal 1 in anticipation of operations resuming at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on Friday, April 14, 2023. The airport was closed late Wednesday after torrential rains caused major flooding across South Florida. Credit: Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP



A Delta Airlines plane departs from Terminal 2 as normal operations resume at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on Friday, April 14, 2023. The airport was closed late Wednesday after torrential rains caused major flooding across South Florida. Credit: Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP



Tatiana Lizarazo Rodriguez listens to her distressed husband Joseph as they clean up their flooded home, Friday, April 14, 2023, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. South Florida has begun draining streets and otherwise cleaning up after an unprecedented storm that dumped upward of 2 feet of rain in a matter of hours. Gov. Ron DeSantis issues a state of emergency for Broward County, which sustained the worst flooding in decades. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

"All of the other airports I looked into, I would be spending more money to fly into them, but would not be able to get a rental car to get to Fort Lauderdale," she said. So she canceled her trip.

While she said she understands that some things, such as weather events, are beyond the festival organizer's control, "it's hard to swallow also losing money."

Broward County Public Schools, the sixth-largest school district in the nation with more than 256,000 students, canceled classes Thursday and Friday after [water](#) inundated halls and classrooms in some schools.

Shawn Bhatti, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Miami, said the region received "an unprecedented amount" of rain. The weather service was still confirming totals, but some gauges showed up to 25 inches (63.5 centimeters) of rainfall.

"For context, within a six-hour period, the amount that fell is about a 1 in 1,000 chance of happening within a given year," Bhatti said. "So it's a very historical type of event."

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