

Remember they said Miami would be under water? A preview of the future

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It's like an unspoken social contract. When people choose to live in South Florida, they must make peace with the possibility that, thanks to hurricanes, there will be flooding and they may incur thousands of

dollars to fix their homes post storm.

But that's supposed to be during a [major storm](#) with a name—like Irma, Ian or Andrew—not any given day during heavy rains as it happened June 12 in Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

Flooding was so intense that part of Interstate 95 was shut down in Broward as water pooled on the highway. Roads were rendered impassible in places like Hollywood and Miami Beach. A rare flash flood emergency was issued.

Last April—even before the 2023 [hurricane season](#) started—historic flooding in Fort Lauderdale caught residents and officials by surprise. The city had to use airboats to rescue people from their homes and, on the following day, abandoned cars caught in the water lined the streets of the city's downtown.

When we hear about the threat of flooding and sea-level rise caused by climate change, that may appear like a distant future. It's not — and this week's torrential rainfall proves South Florida is not fully ready for increased [water levels](#) despite local governments and the state having spent millions of dollars to keep streets dry. Anyone driving in Downtown Miami on a rainy day can see how quickly streets flood.

This is a new reality. With hurricanes, residents have time to prepare. This week, many were caught off guard. Although flood warnings had been in place for days in parts of the region, weather forecasters alerted us too late about the worst outcomes of the storm. In the future, they may have to develop new types of warnings to convey the severity of what's to come.

The pace of sea-level rise has picked up in recent years. The [financial consequences](#) are enormous for [local governments](#) as well as residents as

the cost to insure homes and vehicles rise.

Local sea level has risen about a foot in the last 80 years, with 8 inches of that total in the last 30 years, the Herald reported in May. The second foot will take only 30 years; the next foot, 20 years, according to estimates by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The average elevation in Miami is only 3 feet.

Besides the impacts of climate change, warmer ocean waters and the melting of ice sheets, the Florida Current—an offshoot of the Gulf Stream, a massive current that runs from the tropics to the Arctic—can also impact water levels in Miami, the Herald reported. And parts of the region's land is sinking, though not by much, in a process known as subsidence.

The real answer to South Florida's predicament is to slow down the burning of fossil fuels that cause climate change, according to a consensus by most scientists. The [scientific community](#) has warned that the Earth's temperature is rising to dangerous levels.

Beyond tackling climate change on a global scale, our local and state officials will have to pick up the pace in preparing South Florida for the worst. In the city of Miami, for example, voters approved a 2018 bond referendum to finance [sea-level rise](#) mitigation but a constant complaint is that projects aren't coming online quickly enough.

Florida has taken unprecedented steps to allocate dollars to help communities fund such projects. Gov. Ron DeSantis appointed a resilience officer to prepare Florida for the environmental and [economic impacts](#) of rising sea waters. Yet, this year, DeSantis signed a bill that lowered the standards for sea-rise projects eligible for state funding. He also signed another bill that removes references to "climate change" from Florida law.

Public works projects can take years to come to fruition. This week showed that residents and businesses have to be mentally and physically prepared for flooding that we once thought we could anticipate as we tracked hurricane spaghetti models.

A Miami underwater is becoming a reality we'll have to accept.

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