

State of 'catastrophe' as downpours hit Chile

June 13 2024



Chile's weather service issued the highest level of "weather alarm," covering some 14 million of the 20 million people living in five of the country's 16 regions.

Heavy rains battered south and central Chile on Thursday, killing one person and causing damage to hundreds of homes as authorities declared

a state of catastrophe in five regions of the South American country.

A person died in the southern city of Linares when a street lamp post fell after hours-long downpours and strong winds, the Senapred disaster response service said.

In the latest official report, Interior Minister Carolina Toha said "the worst of this frontal system is behind us, but we cannot let our guard down."

Earlier in the day, Chile's weather service issued the highest level of alarm, covering around 14 million of the 20 million people living in six of the country's 16 regions, but this was later lifted as authorities said 80 percent of the storm had passed, and was headed for neighboring Argentina.

Prior to the arrival of the flood waters, Chile's central region had battled severe drought for 15 years.

"We need boats to get people out," a resident in one of the affected towns, Curanilahue, told national television.

Curanilahue, about 600 kilometers (372 miles) south of the capital Santiago, has been hard hit as the Curanilahue and Las Ranas rivers overflowed after the area received 350 millimeters (13.7 inches) of rain in just hours—more than in 2023 as a whole.



In the city of Vina del Mar, a 200-apartment building of 12 floors is at risk of collapse after the rains caused a massive sink hole underneath it.

Around 2,000 houses in the area were damaged.

President Gabriel Boric, in a message from Sweden where he was on an official visit, warned that the rains "will continue very strongly," as he announced the first death.

Earlier Thursday, before boarding a plane to visit the affected areas, Toha said a state of "catastrophe" had been declared in five regions to expedite the deployment of resources.

Senapred said the downpours have affected about 3,300 people, down

from an initial estimate of 4,300.

In Santiago, which also saw heavy rains, schools were closed for the day and authorities urged people to limit their movements.

In the city of Vina del Mar, experts worked to save a 12-story apartment building at risk of collapse after the rains caused a massive sinkhole underneath it.

The weather service said a cold front over the country was accompanied by an "atmospheric river"—a strip of air carrying huge amounts of moisture.

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