

## After Hurricane Nicole, Condo Owners Grapple With Living Beachside

The evacuation of their buildings revealed a stark truth: Their apartments are likely going to be expensive to repair — and the fees will only go up, up, up.

By Abigail Geiger, Eric Adelson and Livia Albeck-Ripka

Nov. 11, 2022

DAYTONA BEACH SHORES, Fla. — This small city on a barrier island was uncommonly vacant on Friday, normally a busy day for a tourist destination on Florida's Atlantic coast. Just the day before, Hurricane Nicole had torn through Daytona Beach Shores, and few cars and even fewer people were seen on Atlantic Avenue, the main thoroughfare.

What stood out most were the strip's imposing condominiums, hotels and beachy motels; many of them deserted and deemed unsafe.

As of Friday evening, Volusia County had ordered the evacuation of 27 condominiums and hotels, 22 of them in Daytona Beach Shores and five in New Smyrna Beach. They had been compromised by broken sea walls and water intrusion, leading authorities to evacuate thousands of residents, according to county officials. An additional 30 homes in Wilbur-by-the-Sea, an unincorporated community just south of Daytona Beach Shores, were teetering on the edge of the dunes.

It didn't help that Hurricane Ian had hit just six weeks prior, devastating large swaths of coastal Florida.

"Nicole's damage has built upon Ian's damage, and made the situation extremely dangerous and precarious," said Pat Kuehn, a spokeswoman for the county. "We do expect that some of the buildings will be lost."

Since Thursday, building officials and structural engineers have been assessing the damage, building by building, which they currently estimate to be \$471 million, Ms. Kuehn said, adding that it would take "at least several days" to complete.



A damaged condominium in the seaside city of Daytona Beach Shores on Friday. Abigail Geiger

In the meantime, evacuated residents are reeling with not only the short-term reality of being displaced, but existential questions of whether their beachy lifestyle, one so beloved in Florida, will continue to be something they can afford. The expenses of living by the ocean — repairs, insurance and maintenance — will surely only go up, as extreme weather continues to take its toll.

By some estimates, there are more than 1.5 million residential condominium units in Florida, and many of them are aging. In June 2021, the Champlain Towers South, a residential high rise in Surfside, Fla., collapsed and left 98 dead. State lawmakers subsequently passed a bill that required condominium and cooperative associations to re-evaluate their structures by the end of 2024 and have funds in reserve for upgrades.

Florida's two recent hurricanes had reinforced the need for the legislation, said Greg Main-Baillie, a Florida-based construction and development expert with the investment management company Colliers.

The fragility of Daytona Beach Shores' buildings, he added, proved an uncomfortable truth: It is going to become much more expensive to live in beachside apartments in Florida. Though the upgrades are sorely needed, those expenses will likely be prohibitive for some current residents, Mr. Main-Baillie said.

"If I own a condo, I know within the next 18 to 24 months, my condo fees are going to double — for sure," he said. Florida, Mr. Main-Baillie added, has "hundreds if not thousands of buildings that are affected directly by the climate change and the elevation of sea level."

Clay Ervin, who oversees planning, building and zoning for Volusia County, said he anticipated the fixes to the damaged buildings would be complex and extremely costly. Some, he said, might have to be demolished completely.



A damaged seawall behind Sage 'n Sand Motel on Friday in Daytona Beach Shores. Abigail Geiger

Mr. Ervin said that the county's newer structures had fared far better than the older buildings, adding that any structures that were rebuilt would have to comply with local, state and federal requirements for storm surge and flooding.

"There's going to have to be a collaboration," he said. "We will see some difference along our shoreline."

David Haber, a lawyer specializing in condominium litigation, said that he anticipated those involved in rebuilding would be extremely careful. After the collapse of Champlain Towers, he said, "they are going to bend over backward now to be extra cautious."

Nanette McKeel Petrella, who owns three units in one of the evacuated buildings, Castaways Beach Resort, said she expected costs to rise. Part of the building's pool deck had collapsed, with fissures running up and down what remained. Parts of the sea wall had also crumbled.

Ms. McKeel Petrella, 66, is on the building's board of directors and expected the board would raise fees to make the required fixes. "It's the reality," she said.

She said she was less concerned for herself than she was for elderly and disabled residents. "I don't know what they'll be able to afford, if they have to do assessments or raise the condo dues," she said.

The battles had already started.

On Friday afternoon, a handful of Castaways residents sat in the lobby of the building, angry and frustrated over the orders of local police to evacuate from the building, which they perceived to be fine.

One man ripped down a sign in anger. Another, Michael Riviera, who has multiple sclerosis and uses a mobility scooter, said he couldn't get back into his fifth-floor apartment, because the elevator was out of service. He said he had spent the previous night in a hotel, and had paid \$134. Now, he needed to get his belongings and medical supplies.

"Got to go up the steps," Mr. Riviera said. "I'll probably sit on my butt and go up backward."

Robert Longmire, 66, who owns two units, described the building as "perfectly functioning." He added, "Now they've turned off the hot water. They're trying to make it miserable for the tenants that do not want to leave."

In defiance of the evacuation orders, Mr. Longmire grabbed an American flag from behind the front desk and reinstalled it outside the front door.

"We're open," he said.

Livia Albeck-Ripka is a reporter for The Times based in California. She was previously a reporter in the Australia bureau. @livia\_ar

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 15 of the New York edition with the headline: After Hurricane Nicole, Locals Face Hard Realities