

A construction rig fell at Citadel's construction site Brickell. What happened?

By Catherine Odom

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The collapse of a construction rig onto a Brickell street left a trail of destruction and has shaken the neighborhood.

Christina Lardon lives across the street from the construction site at 1201 Brickell Bay Dr., where the new skyscraper headquarters for hedge fund Citadel is being built. A drill rig collapsed just after 8 a.m. Monday, injuring four people.

That morning, Lardon said she drove past the site minutes before the 85-foot rig came crashing down. After arriving at her condo building, she said she heard a loud crash and ran to the street to see what had happened. When she arrived, one car was in flames.

"I could have died yesterday," Lardon told the Miami Herald on Tuesday morning. "It's pretty scary."



Construction equipment fell onto several cars on Brickell Bay Drive on Monday morning. Carl Juste cjuste@miamiherald

WHAT WENT WRONG?

As of Tuesday, it's not known whether operator error, mechanical issues or other factors caused the accident. Investigations by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Miami-Dade Consumer and Neighborhood Protection Division's Unsafe Structures team are underway.

Peter Dyga, the president and CEO of the trade organization Associated Builders and Contractors Florida East Coast, said the investigations will likely take at least a few months to determine a cause.

Work at 1201 Brickell Bay Dr. began in March, and vertical construction has not yet begun.

The machinery that collapsed was a drill rig, which was boring holes for the pilings to support the weight of the supertall skyscraper that will go up on the site. Keller North America was the contractor listed on county permits for the project. Keller did not respond to the Herald's request for comment.

Ken Griffin, the billionaire CEO of Citadel, owns the entire city block surrounding the site and has extensive redevelopment plans for the area. Citadel didn't comment on the accident. Related Companies, the developer building the tower with Citadel, said it's cooperating with the investigations.

On Tuesday morning, the block of Brickell Bay Drive between 12th and 13th streets was still closed and taped off with a heavy law enforcement presence, Lardon said. The equipment that fell on Monday had been removed overnight and was no longer there on Tuesday morning. Videos Lardon took on Monday night show the machinery being removed.

All four people who were injured, three construction workers and one woman who had been driving on Brickell Bay Drive, are expected to survive. Two workers were trapped in the construction trailer when the rig fell.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Working in construction is relatively dangerous, and it comes with more risks than a desk job, said Dyga, the trade group leader. But he said this kind of equipment failure is rare.

In 27 years in the field, Dyga said he'd never seen a drill rig collapse before Monday.

While no lawsuits have been filed yet, it's likely several will be, said Jacob Epstein, an attorney in the Miami-based firm Haber Law's construction practice. He said in these situations, if a suit goes to trial, a jury will decide on the damages and who is at fault. In negligence suits in Florida, a jury can find multiple parties liable.

A project's specific contracts usually determine who is held responsible, Epstein said. It's often the contractor who is considered at fault for accidents that occur during construction, not the developer. It would be unusual for the person who was operating the machinery to be held personally responsible for the accident, he added.