

Federal Response to Surfside Building Collapse in Florida

Release Date: Jul 17, 2021

At 1:23 a.m. on June 24, 2021 a large section of the Champlain Towers South condominium building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed. On June 25, President Biden signed an Emergency Declaration authorizing federal assistance to local and state resources. Federal agencies immediately mobilized to support the search operation, support for survivors, funding for the emergency operation and investigation of the cause of the tragedy.

FEMA Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Blue Incident Support Team

- Within hours of the building collapse, FEMA Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) placed multiple task forces on alert to prepare for deployment.
- The Blue Incident Support Team (IST) deployed with Indiana Task Force 1 (IN-TF1), Ohio Task Force 1 (OH-TF1), New Jersey Task Force 1 (NJ-TF1), Pennsylvania Task Force 1 (PA-TF1) and Virginia Task Force 2 (V-TF2), each with 70-80 members.
- Task force members specialize in structural collapse, search and rescue, hazardous material identification and mitigation, medical support, structural engineering, K9 maneuvers and heavy equipment operation. They deploy with specialized equipment.
- The IST follows the National Incident Management System (NIMS), under which first responders establish incident objectives and work assignments.
- Teams worked 12-hour shifts in a round-the-clock operation at the site.
- In addition to heavy equipment, task force members incorporated hand tools such as jack-hammers, metal and concrete saws, shovels and buckets to peel away multiple layers of rubble from the site, taking great care to search for and recover victims, recover personal effects for surviving families and preserve evidence for the investigation.

National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

- On June 25, NIST initially deployed a team of six scientists and engineers to collect firsthand information on the collapse to determine if a full technical investigation would be conducted under the National Construction Safety Team Act. On June 30, the agency announced it would support a full technical investigation.



- NIST experts are working with federal, state and local authorities to identify and preserve materials and information that might be helpful in understanding why the collapse occurred.
- Working with experts from FEMA, Florida State University, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, National Science Foundation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Geological Survey, NIST has been conducting remote sensing of the debris pile to determine where pieces of evidence were located.
- Remote sensing includes cameras with the ability to add geographical coordinates to a photograph, drones and LiDAR, which uses rapid pulses of light to create a map.
- Hundreds of pieces of evidence have been tagged and moved off-site, including columns, beams and pieces of concrete slab; all have been collected and preserved for study. [NIST scientists will use the evidence](#) to validate computer models of the Champlain Towers South, which will play a key role in determining the likely cause of the partial collapse.

National Science Foundation (NSF)

- The National Science Foundation assisted NIST in the use of LiDAR for 3D mapping of the site.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

- Structural specialists from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) monitored the rubble pile to ensure safety of search teams.
- The team consisted of specially trained engineers who provided technical support and advice to task force leaders to assess damage, mitigate hazards, enable safe entry, and assure mobility throughout the site to enable rescue and lifesaving operations.
- USACE deployed two subject matter experts to provide technical support to help plan for the debris removal operation.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) for the building collapse site, travel by the President, and waivers for drones/Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) missions.
- These actions provided support to the search effort by mapping the disaster scene, monitoring changes in the debris pile, and observing the remaining standing structure so that operations could continue without interruption.
- Local FAA safety inspectors were onsite for surveillance and coordinated with FEMA.



Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

- OSHA was involved immediately to ensure worker safety and health.
- Representatives have been onsite daily providing technical assistance to ensure employers have the personal protective equipment and procedures in place to prevent injuries/illnesses during the rescue and recovery operations.

United States Coast Guard – Base Miami Beach (USCG)

- The Coast Guard provided vehicles for use in the emergency operation.

Federal Emergency Management Agency – Public Assistance Program (FEMA – PA)

- Under the Emergency Declaration, FEMA Public Assistance was authorized to provide reimbursement to local and state authorities for emergency work, including emergency response and debris removal (Categories A and B).
- FEMA PA specialists monitored activities between the incident site and the evidence staging area.
- Normally, the removal of debris from commercial properties such as condominiums is not eligible for FEMA assistance because commercial enterprises are expected to retain insurance that covers debris removal. However, in very limited circumstances FEMA may grant an exception.
- FEMA announced it will cover 100 percent of the cost of emergency work for the first 30 days, beginning June 24, 2021.

Federal Emergency Management Agency - Individual Assistance (FEMA – IA)

- The President's June 25 emergency declaration authorizes FEMA to offer its Individuals and Households Program to survivors and next of kin of lost loved ones of the Champlain Towers South building collapse.
- FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) program is designed to help disaster survivors with basic, critical needs such as a safe, sanitary, and functional place to live while survivors look for long-term housing.
- Due to the unique nature of this tragedy, FEMA is working with survivors in person at the Family Assistance Center in Surfside. FEMA also established a special team to support Surfside survivors by telephone (800-621-3362).
- IA staff coordinate with voluntary agency partners to connect survivors to resources for long-term recovery.



U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal government's main source of disaster funding for long-term rebuilding. The agency provides long-term, low-interest disaster loans for businesses of all sizes, homeowners, renters and private nonprofit organizations for their uninsured physical losses. Small businesses and most private nonprofits can apply for Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) to help meet disaster-related working capital needs.
- The SBA customer service representatives at the Family Assistance Center in Surfside are helping applicants with physical property disaster loan applications. The SBA also established a Business Recovery Center to assist business owners.
- The SBA offers EIDLs in Miami-Dade, Monroe, Collier and Broward counties. An SBA public affairs specialist visited more than 100 businesses in the Surfside Business District and disaster area with information on EIDLs.
- SBA briefed federal agencies, congressional offices, Governor DeSantis, Florida's Department of Economic Opportunity, elected officials, chambers of commerce and media on the disaster assistance loan program.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

- FBI Miami offered full support to the Surfside building collapse operation. The agency immediately deployed assets to local authorities, including assigning a supervisory special agent to the incident command post, an evidence response expert to the scene, a crisis management coordinator to the main command center, and victim specialists to assist with families of survivors.

Department of Veterans Affairs

- The Department of Veterans Affairs deployed a Mobile Vet Center to Surfside to support individuals impacted by the building collapse. The Mobile Vet Center provided free, accessible mental health resources and counseling to individuals in crisis.

Department of State

- A representative of the State Department's Office of Foreign Missions was in Surfside coordinating with the federal response team. The State Department worked to facilitate visas for foreign family members of victims.

