



# MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VIII.B

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DATE: JUNE 16, 2023  
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS  
FROM: STAFF  
SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES

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Recommendation

Information only

## 200,000 gallons of sewage quietly leaked in the Florida Keys — some during a hurricane

BY DAVID GOODHUE



*The treatment plant for the Cudjoe Regional Wastewater System was completed in 2017. Documents obtained by the Miami Herald reveal that parts of the Lower Keys wastewater treatment system leaked sewage only three years after construction was completed. FKAA*

In late September, as Hurricane Ian brushed the Florida Keys on its way to hitting the state's southwestern Gulf coast, nearly 200,000 gallons of raw sewage from the island chain's billion-dollar wastewater treatment system — not even 10 years old — leaked into the porous ground and nearshore waters.

The “unauthorized discharges” weren't disclosed to the public or the five-member board that oversees the wastewater utility. The leaks were revealed in two February “warning letters” issued by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The letters to the utility — the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority — were obtained by the Miami Herald/FLKeysNews.com this week. A month ago, [the Herald obtained documents](#) revealing that the state environmental agency flagged the Keys utility in January 2022 because the Lower Keys portion of the centralized wastewater treatment system leaked more than 90,000 gallons of sewage between June 2020 and February 2021.

The Miami Herald also obtained a memo from April 2023 written by the utility's engineering chief revealing that repairs to parts of the system on Cudjoe, Ramrod, Sugarloaf and Big Coppitt Keys are estimated to cost consumers more than \$16 million.

Greg Veliz, executive director of the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority, said the problems with the Lower Keys portion of the system pre-date his tenure leading the utility, which began about two years ago. The issues, he said, are due to flaws in the way the system was constructed in 2017.

“Some of the stuff didn’t get done right, and we’re correcting that,” Veliz told the Miami Herald/FLKeysNews.com this week. Veliz added that the Keys utility found and reported the leaks to the state.

“For the record, all of these issues were self-reported and we are in constant contact with [Florida Department of Environmental Protection] to ensure that we are moving toward eventual compliance,” he said. “We are currently on schedule for all remediation tasks set in our consent orders.”

Cara Higgins, the only one of the five Aqueduct Authority board members to respond to repeated requests for comment on the issues with the system, said she and her colleagues were “not made aware of the specifics of the spill.” However, she said repairs and improvements to the system are an ongoing process.

“We have been told by staff that, along with occasional mechanical issues, our climate, heavy rainfall and king tides are to blame for a majority of the problems,” Higgins said in an email.



*This is the Cudjoe Key sewer treatment plant.*

Sewage in the Keys is transported via a series of pipes and pump stations to centralized locations on Cudjoe and Big Coppitt. Once there, it is treated to remove harmful pathogens and other waste, and the remaining water is injected into a deep well.

### **‘NOT TOILET-TO-STREET’**

Veliz, the utility’s executive director, said that the system in Cudjoe Key, the portion responsible for the majority of the leaks, was designed to handle 500,000 gallons of water a day. During heavy storms, however, a deluge of rain can force up to three million gallons of water into the system.

“We’re not prepared to hold that,” he said. He added that most of the water that overflows from the system is rain, not pure sewage. “It’s not toilet-to-street,” Veliz said. “Two-thirds of that is rainwater.”

The majority of the leaks included in the state's Feb. 7, 2023, warning letter occurred at the Cudjoe Key Wastewater Treatment Plant, about 23 miles northeast of Key West. There were five "unauthorized discharges or unpermitted sanitary sewage overflows," according to the letter:

- The largest was 126,000 gallons that leaked on Sept. 29.
- The second-largest leak during that window of time from the Cudjoe plant was 24,600 gallons on Sept. 27, wrote Jason Andreotta, director of FDEP's southeast district.
- There were also six "unauthorized discharges" from the system that were not related to Hurricane Ian between October and January, including a large leak of 63,604 gallons on Oct. 7, Andreotta said.

It was not immediately clear where the sewage water ended up. Jon Moore, spokesman for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, said Wednesday that he was working to gather that information.

The FDEP also sent a warning letter to Keys utility on Feb. 7 about more than 33,000 gallons that discharged in a total of three leaks during Hurricane Ian, as well as more than 1,850 gallons from two leaks not related to the hurricane in October and January.

Veliz said the immediate fixes the utility is working on includes replacing manhole covers and sealing rings and exporting capacity from the Big Coppitt plant, most of which he said comes from the Navy base, to the city of Key West.

Much of that work has been done, Veliz said, but it's not immediately clear how effective it's been. "Unfortunately, it's going to take another heavy rain to see if it's working," Veliz said.

## **AGING WATER PIPE INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Aqueduct Authority's sewer woes are compounded by the revelation earlier this year that the 40-plus-year-old freshwater underground pipe system is in disrepair and in need of replacing.

That problem became evident in March [when three water pipe breaks](#) in a week threatened to cut off the fresh water supply the island chain receives from Florida City on the mainland. The cost to completely [replace all the pipes exceeds \\$1 billion](#), and Veliz said the utility doesn't have that money on hand.

For now, the utility is in the process of a \$42 million project in the Upper Keys Village of Islamorada to replace five miles of pipe. The project began in April and is expected to be completed in early 2025, according to the Aqueduct Authority. It's being funded with with \$35 million in grants and \$7 million in low-interest loans, the utility said in a statement.

## **ALREADY UNDER INVESTIGATION**

The Florida environment department informed the Keys authority in May that it was investigating the utility for not keeping up with the aging freshwater infrastructure. In a May 5 letter, Andreotta, the same state official who wrote the warning letters over the sewer leaks, said the Keys utility "failed to maintain its system in good operating condition so as to function as intended, and that the piping infrastructure is "a very deteriorating water system that has not undergone assessment until recent years."

Andreotta added a reverse osmosis desalinization plant on Stock Island in the Lower Keys, which augments the fresh water supply that comes from the mainland in Florida City, is also deteriorating.



*Water pipes are propped up on the side of U.S. 1 at mile marker 79 in the Florida Keys Tuesday, March 14, 2023. The pipes are part of a \$42-million project to replace aging infrastructure in the Upper Keys. David Goodhue/dgoodhue@miamiherald.com*

Veliz said that he and other utility officials are negotiating with the state to resolve all of the issues. He said part of coming into compliance includes the construction of another reverse osmosis plant, which he said is 80% complete. He said the utility has about \$115 million of projects underway.

“No one can say that right now,” Veliz said. “To say we’re not looking to improve our infrastructure is not exactly true.”

Read more at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/florida-keys/article276128836.html#storylink=cpy>

# 10 states sue US government over steep flood insurance rate increases

BY KEVIN MCGILL



*U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Stephen Lehmann / U.S. Coast Guard  
FILE - An aerial view taken from a Coast Guard helicopter showing the continuing effects of flooding caused by Hurricane Joaquin in areas surrounding Charleston, S.C., Oct. 5, 2015.*

Louisiana and nine other states filed a lawsuit against the federal government Thursday to block sharp increases in national flood insurance rates that are slated to be phased in over the coming years, saying the steeper price could cost some people their homes.

Dozens of local Louisiana governments and flood control districts also are plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. district court in New Orleans. The Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are among the defendants.

Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry joined several local officials and business leaders at a news conference announcing the suit Thursday morning.

FEMA has said its new premium system is an improvement over past methods, incorporating data that wasn't used in the past, including scientific models and costs involved in rebuilding a home. The agency has said the old method could result in people with lower-valued homes paying more than a fair share while those with higher-value homes pay relatively less.

However, Louisiana officials have been complaining for months about the coming rate hikes, saying they could impose impossible financial burdens on some in the state.

Increases are capped at 18% annually. But when they are fully implemented, some residents will be paying significantly more.

An April analysis of Louisiana rates by The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate put the average increase in the state at 134%. But officials have been pointing to various individuals facing eventual tenfold increases in their annual premiums, including some whose homes have never flooded.

In a lawsuit filed in April seeking access to information and data used to calculate rates, St. Charles Parish officials said the average cost of flood insurance policies there will increase from \$815 to \$2,766 annually.

At Thursday's news conference, state and local officials renewed complaints that federal officials have refused to divulge methodology and data used in computing the new rates. And, they said, the new premium rates fail to take into account individual homeowners' flood mitigation efforts, such as house raising, or local governments' construction of levees and other flood protection measures.

The high rates could drive some people from their homes, bring on foreclosures and contribute to Louisiana's loss of population, Landry said. "We want reasonable, reliable premiums so that Louisiana can grow and thrive," he said.

Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia are the other states listed as plaintiffs by Landry's office. "It's not just a coastal issue, although it does deeply, deeply impact our coastal communities," Louisiana Solicitor General Elizabeth Murrill said. "It impacts working communities. It impacts anybody who lives near water."

FEMA declined comment in an email, citing a policy of not commenting on pending litigation.

**Read More:** <https://www.southcarolinapublicradio.org/sc-news/2023-06-02/10-states-sue-us-government-over-steep-flood-insurance-rate-increases>

# Miami-Dade sets home price record, yet sales tumble. Broward reports similar housing trend

BY REBECCA SAN JUAN & MICHAEL BUTLER



*Home prices increased in April throughout South Florida, breaking a record for single-family homes in Miami-Dade, according to data from the Miami Association of Realtors. Above is an aerial view of North Bay Village on Nov. 11, 2022. MATIAS J. OCNER  
mocner@miamiherald.com*

Home prices hit a record in Miami-Dade County last month, despite 12 consecutive months of double-digit declines in sales activity. The figures point to a wildly imbalanced residential real estate market, experts said, one in which many local buyers still can't afford to buy homes.

The median price for single-family houses in Miami-Dade reached \$600,000 in April, up from \$565,000 a year ago and surpassed the former [record median](#) of \$579,000 in June 2022, according to the [housing market update](#) released Thursday by the Miami Association of Realtors. In neighboring Broward County, the single-family home midpoint price rose to \$575,000 from \$560,000 in April 2022, while home sales plunged for 14 straight months.

"It is not a healthy market. It is not balanced. It is a market that is still a seller's market," said Kim Henderson, an aspiring homeowner and CEO of Neighborhood Housing Services of South Florida, a community development group assisting people to attain homeownership. "We need the inventory freed up. There's not much inventory in the attainable price range, around \$450,000 to \$600,000. For the basic middle class person, there's not a lot of inventory."

The two counties condominium markets saw the same upward pricing trend. Miami-Dade reported an April median of \$414,900, higher than \$390,000 a year ago, while the median in Broward increased to \$270,000, from \$245,000. Meanwhile, April home sales fell steeply in both counties. Miami-Dade posted 2,222 total sales last month, down 35.5% from 3,445 closings a year ago. Broward saw a 31.4% annual drop, to 3,489 from 4,006 closings a year ago.

Many aspiring buyers wonder if and when they can expect home prices in South Florida to fade. Real estate [experts predicted](#) a dip in condo prices later this year, to go along with the sales slowdown. However, the



market's slim number of available homes is expected to enable sellers to keep the upper hand. Investors, newcomers from across the country and cash buyers also continue to prop up home prices.

The regional housing supply remains another stark indicator of the imbalanced housing landscape. Miami-Dade has 3.3 months of houses and 4.9 months of condos available, but a balanced market consists of six to nine months of inventory. Broward has 2.5 months of houses and 3.3 months of condos.

Blame the tight supply on corporate expansions, digital nomads and the continued stream of transplants, said Tingyu Zhou, a professor of real estate at Florida State University. Many have chosen to call South Florida home during the pandemic that emerged in March 2020. They jump on the trend of remote work, trading high-tax states — like New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut — for the warm climate, loose COVID-19 public health rules and zero Florida and local income taxes.

The migration here has slowed since early in the pandemic, but outside buyers offering cash deals or offers above asking prices on homes still have a profound effect on the regional housing market. In South Florida, close to half of the home deals closed in cash in April. In Broward, 42.4% of sales last month were handled in cash. In Miami-Dade, 37.9% of all home transactions were done without financing. The U.S. average in April was 28% cash home sales.

Overall, the housing market still confounds would-be buyers and renters. Henderson started house hunting in January 2022. Since then, she's made 10 offers and gotten beaten by competitors every single time. Usually, it's investors, out-of-towners making cash purchases or bidders up to \$100,000 over list prices. Many of her clients face similar conditions.

"Other people's money can shove you out of your neighborhood and city," Henderson said, recalling the same trend in Washington, D.C., where she lived and worked until 2018. "If you want to stay, you've got to buy. You have to find a way to purchase a property, so you can live in the community of your choice. There's a transformation going on. It's heartbreaking when people say, 'I'd like to stay and be near my mother and my abuela, but I can't.'" Mortgage rates are part of the problem. They tumbled to 2.65% on a fixed 30-year mortgage in January 2021, according to Freddie Mac data. Many aspiring buyers rushed to buy and homeowners refinanced.

### South Florida's April housing activity

Median sales prices rose for single-family homes in Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

County	Month	Houses median sales price	Annual percent change	Condos median sales price	Annual percent change
Miami-Dade	April 2023	\$600,000	6.2%+	\$414,900	6.4%+
	March 2023	\$570,000		\$400,000	
	April 2022	\$565,000		\$390,000	
Broward	April 2023	\$575,000	2.7%+	\$270,000	10.2%+
	March 2023	\$565,000		\$269,500	
	April 2022	\$560,000		\$245,000	

Table: Rebecca San Juan • Source: [Miami Association of Realtors](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Today, however, Freddie Mac reports a 6.39% rate for a 30-year, fixed-rate mortgage, compared to 5.25% a year ago.

South Miami resident Kyle Payne moved eight months ago from Philadelphia, the nation's fifth-largest city, and considers Miami's housing market far more expensive than he expected. Payne, 30, paid \$900 in monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Philadelphia. Now, he pays \$2,850 a month for a one-bedroom apartment he rents with his girlfriend.

"I got denied originally for two different spots and they each charged a \$600 [rental] application," Payne said of the nonrefundable \$1,200 he spent during his home search. "After getting denied for the second spot, my girl and I said we're not going to force it. We had thoughts of giving up."

Payne has spent several years working as a DJ and event producer and he wanted to live in Midtown to be closer to Miami's nightlife hot spots. The competitive housing market to buy or rent has not allowed that. When his lease expires in September, Payne hopes to move to Midtown or nearby.

Real estate experts said they see hope for waiting buyers that prices could at least stabilize. [More U.S. bank failures](#) and new [Florida legislation](#) are expected to lead to a further slowdown in home sales around the country and possibly price dips here, at least in certain pockets of Miami-Dade.

Earlier this month, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law bill SB 264, which limits the property buying power in Florida of citizens from Russia, China, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela. Neighborhoods in Miami-Dade shaped by these international communities, such as Sunny Isles Beach by Russians and Doral with Venezuelans, are expected to have more home inventory, less demand and maybe cheaper pricing.

"I am cautiously optimistic about this new measure," said Henderson of Neighborhood Housing Services. "My worries are that the most pressing factors defeating low- and moderate-income buyers is the ... [out-of-state] buyers and heavy presence of institutional buyers of single-family homes."

Read more at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/real-estate-news/article275468081.html#storylink=cpy>

## Flood insurance costs are about to explode. ZIP codes closest to the coast will pay the most

BY RON HURTIBISE



*Maritza Pagan works to clean-up her home from flooding in Fort Lauderdale last month. The floods, along with hurricanes Nicole and Ian last year, are convincing more homeowners of the need to maintain flood insurance. But costs for flood insurance are exploding as FEMA tries to more accurately price risk. (Joe Cavaretta/South Florida Sun Sentinel)*

Events of the past year have convinced more Florida homeowners of the need to carry flood insurance. Flooding caused by hurricanes Ian and Nicole caught hundreds, if not thousands, of homeowners across the state by surprise, and without flood insurance.

Similarly, many homeowners affected by last month's historic rainfall in eastern Broward County had no flood insurance and learned tragically that damage caused by water rising from the ground was not covered by their normal homeowner insurance. It's not just flood victims who are experiencing hard lessons about flood insurance.

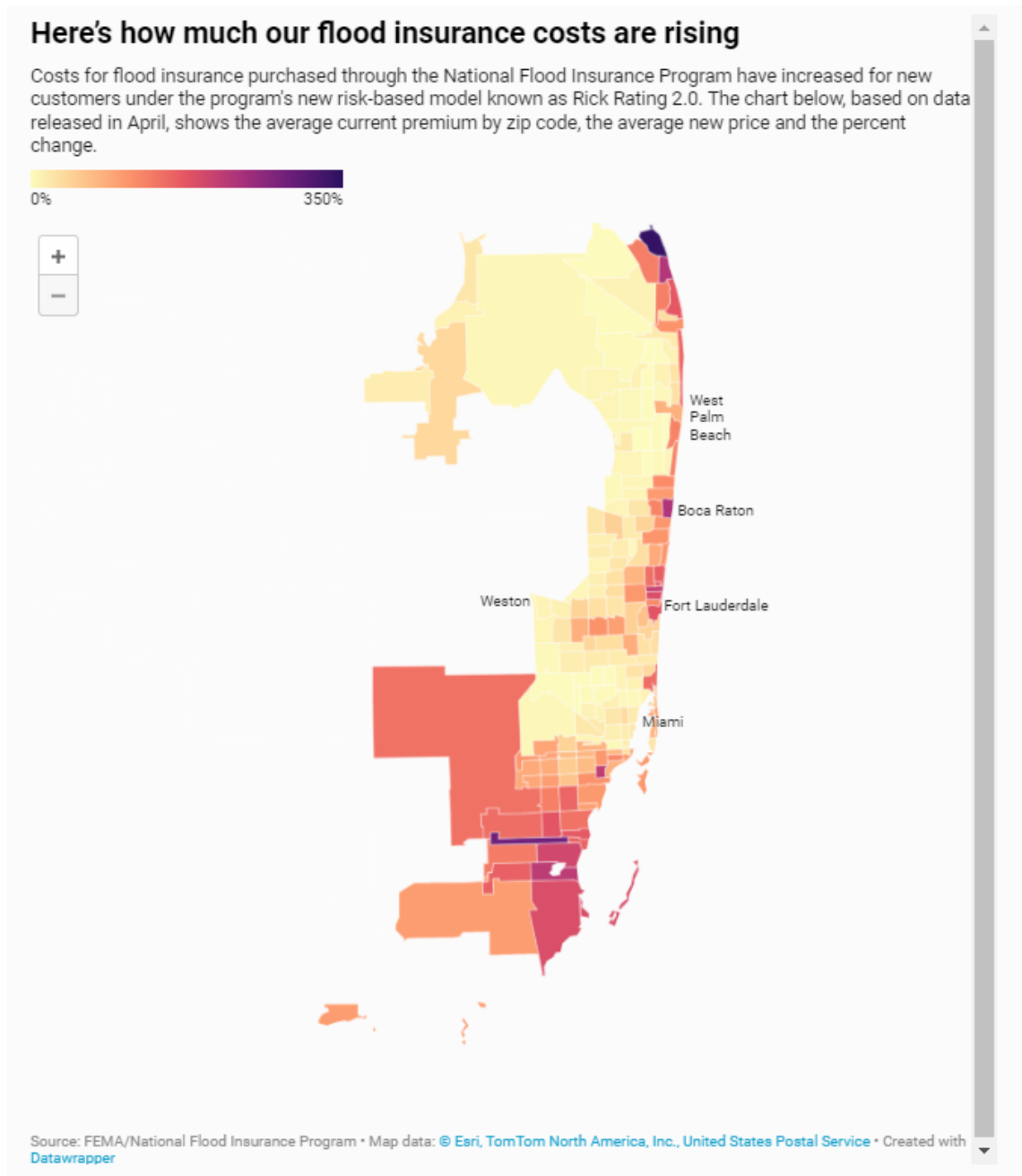
Just as homeowners are realizing the increased risks of going without flood coverage, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has released data showing that coverage costs are exploding for properties in coastal areas most vulnerable to flooding. The cost hikes stem from mandates by Congress to require rates charged by the National Flood Insurance Program, which is run by FEMA, to reflect the cost of flood risk to individual covered properties, and to pay down the program's deficit, which was \$20.5 billion as of last November, according to FEMA.

The result is a new risk pricing model called [Risk Rating 2.0](#), which took effect on Oct. 1, 2021, for new NFIP policies and on April 1, 2022, for renewing policies.

Rather than set rates solely based on a property's elevation within a zone on a Flood Insurance Rate Map, the new approach considers more risk variables such as flood frequency, types of flooding, and distance to a water

source, along with individual property characteristics like elevation and the cost to rebuild, FEMA’s website states.

Improved modeling, however, is of little comfort to homeowners who will have to pay more for flood insurance at the same time costs of regular multiperil property insurance are skyrocketing. Recently, FEMA released a spreadsheet that compared average premiums currently and how high they’ll climb under the new pricing model. For example, homeowners in Boca Raton’s 33432 ZIP code can look forward to a whopping 229% flood insurance premium increase, from an average \$950 per policy to \$3,128.



In Broward County, the 33305 ZIP code that includes Wilton Manors and Fort Lauderdale neighborhoods near the Middle River will pay 209% more, from \$1,099 to \$3,400. In the 33315 zip code, which includes Fort Lauderdale’s Edgewood neighborhood that was among the hardest-hit by last month’s flooding, average rates

will increase by 64% — from \$863 currently to \$1,420. These numbers are averages. Within each ZIP code are less expensive homes with cheaper coverage costs and pricier homes that will cost even more to insure.

Unsurprisingly, homes nearest the coast, particularly in low-lying areas, cost far more to insure than homes on higher ground in western suburban cities. For example, homeowners in Coral Springs' 33071 ZIP code are looking at a total premium increase of just 17.6% — from \$669 to \$787.

FEMA says the new pricing model will also drive down the cost of flood insurance for customers with low-risk characteristics. Yet, none of South Florida's ZIP codes will see average rates decrease, FEMA's data shows.

Not everyone facing rate increases will have to pay the higher premiums immediately. While homeowners who previously did not carry NFIP flood insurance will have to pay the new higher prices if they want a new policy, price hikes for existing policyholders are capped at 18% a year for homesteaded properties and 25% annually for second homes or investment properties, until they reach the new rates.

If the total increase is 18% or less, affected homeowners will pay it just once — presumably until FEMA raises rates again, whenever that happens.

### **Few homes have flood insurance, even in Florida**

Although Florida has the largest number of NFIP flood insurance policies of any U.S. state — 597,967 of 2.2 million in the U.S., FEMA data shows, the percentage of covered homes remains low.

Florida has 3.8 million detached single-family homes, according to 2020 census figures. The number of FEMA flood insurance policies are just 15.7% of that total. In South Florida's tricounty region, the percentage is 20.8%.

The actual percentages of homes with flood insurance are likely to be a little different. The above estimates don't take into account private flood insurance policies, which are increasing but still a fraction of the number of federally-backed policies. And the estimates exclude attached single-family homes, such as townhomes. The percentage also does not include condominiums, which are typically covered by blanket commercial policies.

Experts advise every Florida homeowner to buy flood insurance because flooding can happen throughout the state, as during last fall's hurricanes. But many buy flood insurance only when required, such as home loan borrowers with federally backed mortgages who live in high-risk flood zones.

### **Flood insurance required for some with Citizens insurance**

This year, a new set of homeowners are required to buy flood insurance. Customers of state-owned Citizens Property Insurance Corp. who live in high-risk flood zones are required to also carry flood insurance. That mandate, enacted by the state Legislature and governor last year, took effect on April 1 for new Citizens policyholders and on July 1 for renewing policyholders.

Under the new law, all Citizens policyholders will have to buy flood insurance by 2027.

According to Citizens data, 228,203 of the company's 1.2 million customers are now required to buy flood insurance. Of them, 105,763 are in Broward, Palm Beach or Miami-Dade counties. When enacted last year, the law also required condo owners covered by Citizens to buy flood insurance. They were exempted, however, by

a new law that was passed during the just-completed spring Legislative session and now awaits the governor's signature. The change followed complaints that flood insurance is unnecessary for residents on upper floors of multistory buildings and for those covered by commercial policies that cover all units.

Although the mandate remains in place legally, Citizens has stopped sending notices to condo owners telling them they must buy flood insurance at renewal time, Citizens spokesman Michael Peltier said. Once it is signed, condo owners who bought coverage will be able to drop it.

If they bought FEMA coverage, they can request refunds if their policies have not yet taken effect, the NFIP's website states. Because the flood insurance requirement for renewing Citizens customers won't take effect until July 1, Ryan Papy, president of Palmetto Bay-based Keyes Insurance, says it's still a bit early to gauge the impact. "There hasn't been that much sticker shock," Papy said in an email. "Many (premiums) in Miami-Dade County have gone down." But he added, "We do see issues when some clients are purchasing new property." The difference between a new owner's premiums and the capped rates paid by the previous owner can sometimes "be extreme," he said.

### **Save money on the private market?**

Florida homeowners hit hardest by rising NFIP rate hikes might ask their agents to see if they can save money by checking out the private flood insurance market. Neptune Flood, the nation's largest private flood insurer with more than 150,000 clients, can save policyholders up to 25% off the cost of comparable NFIP coverage, Neptune spokeswoman Loren Pomerantz said by email. Private flood insurance satisfies requirements of both federal mortgage guarantors and Citizens, according to Pomerantz and Peltier.

Pomerantz said Neptune's sales in Florida have increased in recent months. Sales climbed 20% in areas hard hit by Hurricane Ian prior to the new Citizens mandate taking effect. In high-risk flood zones, sales have increased 25% since April 1 compared to the same period last year, she said.

Private flood insurance also offers coverage that far exceeds the NFIP's \$250,000 cap for structural damage and \$100,000 limit for personal property damage. "We can cover homes for up to \$4 million in building coverage and \$500,000 of personal property," she said. "Additional coverage options not available through the NFIP include pool repair and refill, replacement cost on contents, temporary living expenses and more. This allows a homeowner to adequately cover their property and protect their families in the event of a flood-related loss."

**Read More:** <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2023/05/19/flood-insurance-costs-are-about-to-explode-zip-codes-closest-to-the-coast-will-pay-the-most/>

## Three Florida Keys water main pipes burst in a week. The state is now investigating

BY DAVID GOODHUE



*Maritza Pagan works to clean-up her home from flooding in Fort Lauderdale last month. The floods, along with hurricanes Nicole and Ian last year, are convincing more homeowners of the need to maintain flood insurance. But costs for flood insurance are exploding as FEMA tries to more accurately price risk. (Joe Cavaretta/South Florida Sun Sentinel)*

The state's main environmental enforcement agency this month informed the Florida Keys' water utility that it's under investigation for failing to maintain aging underground pipes, according to a letter obtained by the Miami Herald.

The deteriorating state of the pipes resulted in [three breaks in one week](#) in March, disrupting traffic and temporarily cutting off water to the island chain, where residents, businesses and tourists continue to be asked to conserve usage.

The 40-year-old system is the only means of piping freshwater throughout the 120-mile archipelago.

The letter comes two months after the disrupting water main breaks. Greg Veliz, executive director of the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority, said replacing all the underground pipes would [cost more than \\$1 billion](#) — and the utility didn't have that money in reserves.

"Every day, we talk about funding. Whether it be from our grant writers, our lobbyists, whether it be from our finance department, seeing if we can get low-interest loans; we're exercising every possibility in order to try to get funding for this project," Veliz said in an interview with the Miami Herald/FLKeysnews.com.

The May 5 letter states the the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority is in violation of state statute because it "failed to maintain its system in good operating condition so as to function as intended."

The water utility also "has known for some time that there is a desperate need for the transmission main," wrote Jason Andreotta, southeast district director of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The cause of the pipe breaks, according to the letter, is “a very deteriorating water system that has not undergone assessment until recent years.”

Andreotta added a reverse osmosis desalinization plant on Stock Island in the Lower Keys, which augments the fresh water supply that comes from the mainland in Florida City, is also deteriorating.

## **FLORIDA AGENCY VS. KEYS UTILITY**

Veliz on Thursday said the Aquaduct Authority received the letter, but called it “a breakdown in communications” between the utility and the state agency he thinks will soon get resolved.

“They didn’t have the right information in front of them at the time, and we believe they have that now,” Veliz said. “But, we have not received a response.”

Jon Moore, a spokesman for the state environmental protection agency, said the letter was issued “as the first step in our enforcement process and requires the FKAA to develop a structured path towards a timely and thorough rehabilitation of their drinking water infrastructure.”

The letter states the investigation could result in liability for damages and the judicial imposition of civil penalties.

The state agency “will continue its stringent oversight to ensure the remaining repairs are conducted in a thorough but expeditious manner so that residents have access to a restored, fully functioning drinking water system as soon as possible,” Moore said.

The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority is in the process of restoring [five miles of pipe](#) in the Upper Keys Village of Islamorada.

Veliz said the \$42 million project is ahead of schedule since it got underway in April. The scheduled completion date is February 2025 and is being funded with \$35 million in grants and \$7 million in low-interest loans, the utility said in a statement.

## **WHAT ABOUT THE AQUEDUCT AUTHORITY MONEY RESERVES?**

Veliz, on the job for two years, says doesn’t know why the utility doesn’t have more money in reserves.

“For me to sit down and play Monday morning quarterback and say why we don’t have the funding available, I don’t know how you would be able to accumulate a million dollars, first of all, and, let me tell you, there would be no way to foresee that anyway,” he said. “It’s impossible to sit here now and try to make assumptions about what happened and why wasn’t funding put aside.”

He also said that since the Islamorada project was in its planning phase, costs have risen significantly. “From the time we started planning this project in 2017 to the time we got shovels in the ground and a contract on board, the price has gone from \$5 million per mile to \$8 to \$10 million a mile,” Veliz said. “So, there’s no way we could have foreseen that anyway.”

**Read More:** <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/florida-keys/article275544461.html>



# 'We're gonna have serious problems': Public officials look to solve South Florida's longer-term trash conundrum

BY DANIEL RIVERO



*A wheel loader moved a pile of mixed, unsorted recycled materials, including plastic, cardboard, paper, that recently arrived at the Waste Management Recycling Plant at 20701 Pembroke Road in Pembroke Pines, Fla, on Friday, April 8, 2022. | Pedro Portal Pportal@Miamiherald.Com*

The fire at the [Covanta energy plant in Doral](#) that spewed smoke, called for multiple firefighter crews and forced residents to stay indoors has reopened the conversation about South Florida's relationship with trash.

The [facility](#) takes in roughly half of Miami-Dade County's garbage, from over 300,000 homes. The nearly week-long blaze caused temporary delays in collection in certain areas, prompting public officials to rethink how much waste people produce and where to put our garbage — for the long haul.

Miami-Dade County Commissioner [Rene Garcia](#) said that waste management is not always top of mind for a lot of people.

WLRN's Danny Rivero spoke to Garcia about some of potential solutions to this public policy dilemma, particularly by working with neighboring counties to create a regional system of waste collection.

"Because if we don't do that now, then next ten years we're going to have some serious problems and we should not wait," he said.

*This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.*

**WLRN: From your perspective, what are the biggest issues that the county is facing when it comes to recycling and also just waste management moving forward?**

**GARCIA:** One of the things that we need to look at as we move towards a future is that Miami-Dade County is landlocked. There's not much land left in Miami-Dade County. Granted, in the south and on the west side, we

do have a lot of agricultural land. I think for one, we should really protect those lands. Am I for development? Yeah, I'm for responsible development, but we need to make sure we protect those lands. When it comes to having another waste site, I don't think we have the capacity for it. We see some of our facilities that are getting to maybe have five, ten, maybe 15 years left as to the life of these these [landfills]. What do we do with them afterwards? What do we do when they get filled?

So one of the things that I've been working is, through the South Florida Regional Planning Council, to look at solid waste — through Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe, although Monroe doesn't have any landfills, but Dade, Broward and Palm Beach, they do. We want to regionalize a solid waste collection in our community. So, we are now trying to work together with the multiple jurisdictions to come up with a game plan to see how we best address the issue of of solid waste and garbage in our community, because if we don't do that now, then next ten years we're going to have some serious problems, and we should not wait.

**At the heart of it, a lot of the issues we're talking about with the waste management and recycling come down to how much and what kind of waste we generate in the first place, before even putting it in the bin.**

**There is a bill in the Florida Senate now sponsored by Republican Sen. Anna Maria Rodriguez, who represents parts of Miami-Dade County and the Keys. That bill would let local governments set up pilot programs for regulating single-use plastics like shopping bags, water bottles, etc.**

**Would you be in favor of seeing something like that pass and giving municipalities the ability to maybe limit what kind of waste we're generating on the front end instead of the back end?**

Yes. First of all, I have to say yes, because it's Anna Maria Rodriguez and she's my friend and I like everything [she does]. She does a lot of things that are very conscientious about the environment and ensure that corporations and organizations that work within Miami-Dade County or different jurisdictions are given notice, to make sure that the products that we use have multiple purposes or multiple uses or are recyclable.

Because one of the things that I have learned through this new endeavor that I'm in — garbage and recyclables — is that every recyclable plastic is not recycled. All of this has an educational component to it, we need to start educating the public on how to best treat our solid waste.

**What's at risk if we don't do a lot to solve all these questions? What would it mean if we don't figure this out? It would mean we're going to be trucking things up to Central Florida and spending way more money than we're spending now?**

What's at risk is. If we don't find a solution, we may not know what to do with our with our garbage. And yes, it's easy to say, well, truck it up, but we have to find communities that want to take it, right?

Look what happened with China. You know, we've become so accustomed to China taking our plastics, and now they're not. And now we're stuck. So we, as Americans, as local governments ... solid waste falls on us, not on the state or the federal government. It falls on local jurisdiction to take care of it.

**Read More: <https://www.wlrn.org/environment/2023-03-01/were-gonna-have-serious-problems-public-officials-look-to-solve-south-floridas-longer-term-trash-conundrum>**