

# DISASTERS UPDATE

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Date: 16.08.16

## TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

### National

## Fire breaks out across 20 acres in Vellalore

TNN | Aug 16, 2016, 06.03 AM IST

COIMBATORE: A major fire broke out at the Vellalore dumpyard on Monday engulfing over 20 acres. Fire and rescue officials reached the spot and five fire tenders have been put to service to control the blaze.

Two poclains (hydraulic excavators) were called to service and water tankers were also brought to the site. As per officials, the fire must have started around noon and senior fire department officials were at the spot to check the progress of the rescue efforts. "The fire is mainly restricted to the northern part of dumpyard, near Konavaickalpalayam. It spread across 20 acres due to the wind and we expect to completely contain it by tomorrow morning," said a senior fire official.

Coimbatore Corporation commissioner K Vijaya Karthikeyan hinted at some foul play. "I have called for a detailed enquiry into the incident. Every time, on a holiday such outbreak of fire is reported at the dumpyard. Based on the enquiry we will also register a FIR with the city police if required," he said. To avoid such incidents in future, he said, civic body will install CCTV cameras at the yard. "Since minor fires keep breaking out at the yard, we plan to install cameras to take control over it before it spreads," he said.

Activists at Vellalore said, the civic body should have been better prepared to deal with such situations. "This is not the first time that such a fire has broken out at the dumpyard. As per norms they should have stationed a fire tender at the yard. Also, none of the borewell connections were active. Even after the fire broke out, officials had to wait for over two hours until the water tankers reached the spot," said Daniel Jesudas, a resident of Vellalore and an RTI activist.

The owners of the Coimbatore Integrated Waste Management said the fire spread to over 20 acres. They said they suspected someone from outside behind starting the fire. "There is a chance that the fire could have started on its own, but we are also looking at the possibility of an outside hand behind this," said an official.

Another resident staying close to the yard said there were over 20 watchmen inside the yard. "Though it is a holiday, watchmen and other officials should have been more alert and ensured such incidents are avoided," the resident said.

The owners compost over 400 tonnes of waste daily, but officials said only plastic and iron was segregated and the rest dumped in landfills. At the compost yard nearly 1,200 tonnes of waste is dumped of which 100 tonnes is composted in vermin-compost plant.

## International

# 'Act of God': Ruinous flooding catches Louisiana off guard

AP | Aug 16, 2016, 08.41 AM IST

BATON ROUGE (Louisiana): An act of God is how some are describing it, a catastrophic 48-hour torrent of rain that sent thousands of people in [Louisiana](#) scrambling for safety and left many wondering how a region accustomed to hurricanes could get caught off guard so badly. At least six people have been killed and more than 20,000 have had to be rescued since Friday in some of the worst flooding the state has ever seen. A seventh body was pulled from floodwaters on Monday, said Casey Rayborn Hicks, a spokeswoman for the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office. A volunteer patrolling in his boat found the body, and sheriff's units confirmed the discovery. The manner of death and identification — confirmation of a flood-related death — will come from the coroner's office, Hicks said. As of Monday, the rain had mostly stopped, but rivers and creeks in many areas were still dangerously bloated and new places were getting hit by flooding. In areas south of Baton Rouge, people were filling sandbags, protecting their houses and bracing for the worst as the water worked its way south. In Ascension Parish officials said some small towns have already been swamped by floods.

More than 11,000 people were staying in shelters, with a movie studio and a civic center that usually hosts concerts and ballets pressed into service. "It was an absolute act of God. We're talking about places that have literally never flooded before," said Anthony "Ace" Cox, who started a Facebook group to help collect information about where people were stranded. He was in Baton Rouge to help his parents and grandparents, who got flooded out. "Everybody got caught off guard," he said.

Forecasters said one reason was the sheer, almost off-the-charts intensity of the storm and the difficulty of predicting how bad it would be. Meteorologist Ken Graham of the National Weather Service's office in Slidell said forecasters alerted people days in advance of the storms. The forecasts

Thursday were for 8 inches of rain, with higher totals expected in some areas. But Graham emphasized that forecasting exactly how much rain is going to fall and where is nearly impossible. "It's one thing to say we're getting set up for a lot of rain. It's another thing to say where is this going to be," he said. Some areas, such as the town of Zachary, received more than 2 feet of rain in a 48-hour period that ended Saturday morning. Another hard-hit area, Livingston, got nearly 22 inches over the same stretch.

Graham said the odds of that much rain were 1 in 500 in some places, and 1 in 1,000 in others.



*Army [National Guard](#) vehicles travel through floodwaters as rescue operations continue after heavy rains inundated parts of Louisiana. (AP photo)*

Those rainfalls sent river levels in the region to historic highs, in some cases shattering the old records mostly set during the 1983 floods. Unlike in a hurricane, when shelters are established well in advance by parish governments and the [Red Cross](#) when the threat becomes obvious, shelters for those driven from their homes by the flooding were set up more haphazardly by parish officials.

As the scope of the disaster became clear, churches, schools and other places opened their doors to take evacuees. Shelters filled up so fast that some people had to sleep on the floor Saturday night because not enough cots had arrived. And some shelters had to shut down when they, too, started to take on water. Marc and Crystal Matherne and their three children loaded up their cars with their three dogs and drove out of their flooded Baton Rouge neighborhood on Sunday before the water got too deep to pass.

After a night in the shelter, Marc Matherne planned to head back to see if he could help stranded neighbors. His wife said she felt pangs of "survivor guilt," knowing that their home was probably still dry while so many neighbors had flood damage.

"I want to blame somebody because of all the hurt that's going on, but I don't know if anybody knew" how bad the flooding would be, she said. "It just seemed like a normal event for us, but it wasn't."



*A Louisiana Army National Guard dump truck that drove off the road is submerged in flood waters. (AP photo)*

Volunteers have been dropping off supplies and food like jambalaya or red beans and rice at shelters. They have also been going out in boats — locally referred to as the "Cajun Navy" — to rescue people, supplementing the efforts of National Guardsmen, state officials and Coast Guardsmen in high-water vehicles, boats and helicopters.

Governor John Bel Edwards defended the state's response, saying the unprecedented flooding had "presented tremendous challenges for everyone." "But I'm very proud of the effort that we're making. More than anything else, I'm proud that Louisianians are taking care of their own and people are being neighbors to one another," he said, stressing that search and rescue operations were still ongoing.

Lt Davis Madere of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, who spent days rescuing people and their animals, said the floodwaters are a potential minefield of submerged vehicles, fences and mailboxes that can trip up boats.

*Compiled by  
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