

Florida resort residents rush out as building collapses into sinkhole

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Buildings collapse into a sinkhole at the Summer Bay Resort on U.S. Highway 192 in Clermont, Florida. Guests had only 10 to 15 minutes to escape. The resort is located about 7 miles east of Walt Disney World. Photo: Red Huber/Orlando Sentinel/MCT

ORLANDO, Fla. — First came the cracking sounds. Then windows started blowing out. And before they knew it, guests felt the ground beneath their hotel near Disney World in Florida sink into the ground.

This was no earthquake, though. It was a sinkhole, and it opened in the earth at the Summer Bay Resort late Sunday, Aug. 11.

The sinkhole was 60 feet round -- about the distance from home plate to the pitcher's mound on a baseball field. It was 15 feet deep -- about the size of an adult giraffe. Guests had only 10 to 15 minutes to escape the collapsing buildings.

No one was injured.

Sliced Almost In Half

“My heart sunk. I was sick to my stomach,” said resort president Paul Caldwell. He got the call from his staff at about 10:30 p.m. They told him the 15-year-old buildings full of guests were sinking into the ground.

Sinkholes are common in land where the rock below the surface can be dissolved by water flowing through it, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The science groups says that type of land is found in about one-fifth of the country. Florida, Texas, Alabama, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee and Pennsylvania get a lot of damage from sinkholes.

A guest ran into the street to alert resort workers after the windows began to shatter, Caldwell said. Firefighters arriving on scene immediately went door-to-door of building 104 to help guests escape. The three-story building was sliced nearly in half.

About 20 people left behind everything they brought to their vacation home. They got out through a connected building just before building 104 collapsed.

Limestone Dissolves, Sinkhole Forms

A building next door was also evacuated. All the guests had been accounted for. Caldwell said they were moved to other buildings on the property.

The east side of the property lost power. But none of the other units were otherwise affected, he said. Firefighters are waiting for engineers to decide what damage the gaping hole caused.

Part of Florida sits on soft limestone. The limestone dissolves when rain water with a high amount of acid runs through the soil. Then a sinkhole forms. Construction and groundwater pumping can speed up this erosion. So can drought followed by heavy rain.

Sand moves through and forms a hole on the surface when the limestone dissolves. It looks like the sand is going through the neck of an hourglass.

A Man Died In March Sinkhole

Sinkholes do a lot of damage. They cost people in Florida millions of dollars each year.

Sinkholes happen a lot in Florida's Tampa Bay area. One man there suffered a terrible end in March. A 50-foot-deep sinkhole swallowed 37-year-old Jeffrey Bush. It happened while he was sleeping inside his home. The house was condemned. Bush was declared dead.

Officials investigated a possible sinkhole at another Florida home in June. The homeowner's pool cracked and shifted in the ground. The hole was 40 to 50 feet wide. It was 30 to 40 feet deep. But the hole stabilized before the pool sank.

Another sinkhole swallowed a car dealership and home in 1981. That was a really big hole. It was 320-feet-wide and 90-foot-deep.

Quiz

- 1 What is the MAIN idea of the article?
 - (A) Sinkholes cost people in Florida millions of dollars every year.
 - (B) A sinkhole caused a resort near Disney World to collapse, but no one was hurt.
 - (C) A man was killed when a sinkhole swallowed his home in Florida.
 - (D) When limestone dissolves it causes a sinkhole to occur.

- 2 Which of the following details from the section "Sliced Almost In Half" is MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
 - (A) The resort president was very worried when he heard about the sinkhole.
 - (B) The type of land that experiences sinkholes is found in about one-fifth of the country.
 - (C) Firefighters quickly helped all the trapped guests escape before the building collapsed.
 - (D) People left behind everything they brought to their vacation home.

- 3 According to the article, why have there been SO MANY sinkholes in Florida?
 - (A) Many parts of Florida have limestone underneath the soil that can be dissolved by rain and acids in the soil.
 - (B) Florida has many sandy beaches and when the sand slowly moves through the rocks below the surface, a sinkhole is formed.
 - (C) There are a lot of huge resorts and large homes in Florida that cause the ground to collapse because they are so heavy.
 - (D) There are many earthquakes in Florida that can cause sinkholes when the ground moves.

- 4 According to the article, which of the following BEST describes the resort president's reaction to the news of the sinkhole?
 - (A) worry
 - (B) anger
 - (C) relief
 - (D) sadness

Answer Key

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