

Fears Over Aftermath of Mexico Floods

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VILLAHERMOSA, [Mexico](#), Nov. 6 — Many parts of this city remained underwater on Tuesday, more than a week after torrential rain swelled rivers that then burst their banks, as the authorities and residents expressed concern about the potential for looting and for outbreaks of disease.

In the neighborhood Las Gaviotas, one of the hardest hit, the floodwaters were more than nine feet deep.

“We were the first to leave and we will be the last to go back,” said Ruth Sánchez Acosta, who was staying with friends near Villahermosa’s main cathedral.

In flooded areas of Villahermosa, the capital of the Gulf state of Tabasco, many residents paid quick visits to their houses as the waters receded to feed abandoned pets, retrieve soggy clothes and lay sodden furniture out to dry on the roof.

The authorities began pumping water from Villahermosa’s commercial district, and by the end of the afternoon Paseo Tabasco, the main avenue, which last week was a broad canal under seven feet of water, had become a shallow channel.

But the receding waters also heightened the risk of disease. Officials said there was no sign yet of epidemics, although the floodwaters’ descent could lead to outbreaks of diseases like malaria, dengue fever and cholera. Officials said they planned to spray the city to prevent outbreaks. Along the flooded streets, the risk of disease was visible. Dead chickens, dogs and even pigs floated in the water. New medical teams arrived in the city, joining teams of medical workers and police officers from elsewhere in Mexico.

The lower waters also made it easier for looters to get into abandoned houses. Residents said thieves had been traveling the flooded streets at night.

During the day, soldiers and police officers patrolled some of the flooded streets, but they were not present at night. Thousands of people in flooded areas chose to remain on their roofs to guard their few possessions.

In a radio interview on Tuesday, José Luis Luege, the head of Mexico’s National Water Commission, said it would take a couple of weeks to pump out many neighborhoods. Residents of Las Gaviotas, he said, would not be able to go home until the end of the month.

Authorities raised the death toll in Tabasco to three. In the neighboring state of Chiapas, where a mudslide late Sunday in the riverside village of Juan de Grijalva left at least 16 people missing, the authorities said that they had found two bodies and that they were continuing to search for more.

An estimated 60,000 to 70,000 people were being housed in shelters, Interior Minister Francisco Ramírez Acuña said in a television interview on Tuesday. He estimated that some 400,000 people in Tabasco would need some kind of government aid to get back on their feet.

President [Felipe Calderón](#) visited both Tabasco and Chiapas on Tuesday. He announced a reconstruction fund of about \$670 million, but admitted that it would be only a start. The Tabasco governor, Andrés Grenier, said the damage had reached almost \$5 billion.

The natural disaster in low-lying Tabasco has captured the country's attention. Mexicans have donated food, water, clothes, diapers and medicine.