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Tenants Forced to Evacuate After Downtown Miami Building Fails Fire Inspection

Tenants of the historic Huntington Building say they were rushed out of the building last week after the city deemed the building unsafe



Tenants who live and work in the historic Huntington Building in downtown Miami said they were forced to evacuate last Thursday after the structure was deemed unsafe.

Dozens of code enforcement officers and crews with the City of Miami Fire Rescue swarmed in and said everyone had to leave the building.

“They just came and told us, hey, you have to move out tomorrow, this building is unsafe,” said tenant Daria Marchak.

Marchak said she was one of about 70 businesses that had to rush out of the decades-old building at 168 Southeast 1st Street in downtown Miami.

An unsafe structures notice was posted on the front door a few days later and a police officer was in the lobby Friday as tenants took out some of their belongings and furniture.

“They made it seem like we were going through what Surfside went through and it will collapse on us,” said tenant Diliaana Alexander.

Alexander has a cultural non-profit that supports independent creators on the fourth floor. She has been in the building for six years and said there was no advance warning before the evacuation.

“We were told that our exits are unsafe but I took both exits and I’ve been taking one of them for the last five years with no problem,” Alexander said. “So I don’t understand why it needs to be such a draconian way of forcing out and maybe costing us our livelihoods.”



March 24, 2023

Unique Monthly Visitors: 1,100,000

According to the City of Miami, a routine fire inspection found illegal remodeling near the fire exit that created a safety hazard.

Fire officials spoke with concerned tenants at the Miami Downtown Development Authority Board of Directors Meeting on Friday.

“Why is it now an emergency? Why now do we have to move out? Once it is brought to my attention as the fire chief, we had a responsibility,” said Fire Chief Joseph Zahralban with City of Miami Fire Rescue. “God forbid something happens now or in the 30-day window that you were describing after violations have been brought to my attention, God forbid a fire or other emergency exists in that building and someone perishes.”

Some in the building said they were worried other factors could be at play.

“As soon as we started telling our story to attorneys and to architects, they said hey, are you sure that there isn’t a big developer or investor who wants your building? It’s really great real estate,” Alexander said.

There are currently no public plans with a developer for this building.

Tenants now figuring out how to work without a space.

“I’m about to lose all my tenants. They are moving out. They said we will do everything possible to get you back as soon as possible so I really hope that’s the case,” Alexander said.

“I hope that they will fix it as fast as possible or give us another place to work because this is not right,” Marchak said.

A spokesperson with the City of Miami sent out the following statement Thursday:

“On March 16, 2023, floors 2 through 13 of the building located at 168 SE 1 Street, a commercial building located in downtown Miami, was evacuated by the City of Miami. The evacuation of a building is not a decision taken lightly. The building is primarily occupied by businesses.

A fire inspection performed by members of the Miami Fire Department uncovered illegal remodeling that impacted the required secondary means of egress throughout the structure. This situation creates a life safety issue not only to the tenants, but to visitors and the entire surrounding area. As of today, the building management is working with City of Miami officials to assist tenants in removal of necessary office equipment.

Assessments are currently being made to determine the full scope of repairs necessary to allow the building to be occupied once again. The City's Fire, Building and Code Enforcement Departments stand ready to work with building management to assist with the necessary permits required to rectify the situation and expedite matters for re-occupancy.”