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15 Philadelphia buildings collapse

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Years of urban decay are taking a serious toll on Philadelphia's once vibrant neighborhoods: As many as 15 buildings have collapsed since Thursday, and the city believes more than 3,100 others could fall down at any moment.

All of the buildings that collapsed were rowhouses in and around poverty-stricken North Philadelphia. All but two had been abandoned. As a result, only minor injuries resulted: Two men were hurt when a large wooden awning fell as they were walking by.

Experts are not sure exactly what caused the rash of building collapses but they think it might have something to do with this summer's wet weather. Water can erode joints and weaken foundations, especially in houses with leaky roofs or inadequate downspouts.

"You would be surprised at how certain things such as having a downspout on your house, having your roof inspected — that is what keeps these properties from collapsing," said Andrea White of the city's Department of Licenses and Inspections.

The problem, though, was years in the making. Philadelphia's housing stock has been deteriorating for

three decades, largely the result of a population exodus that cost the city 550,000 residents. Philadelphia is now down to 1.4 million people.

"We are trying to get a better handle on what condition the buildings are in."

— Barbara Grant
Spokesperson for Philadelphia's mayor
John F. Street

City officials said Philadelphia now has about 20,000 vacant lots and more than 30,000 vacant houses. Of those, more than 3,100 are classified as "imminently dangerous," or in immediate need of demolition.

City inspectors plan to use helicopters Tuesday to assess the extent of the problem and look for telltale signs of buildings in danger, such as rain-water pooled on roofs and trees growing wild from the tops of houses.

The city also plans to step up demolition from about 30 buildings a week to as many as 60. The cost ranges

from \$6,500 to \$11,000 per building.

"We're trying to get a better handle on what condition the buildings are in, which is why we're going to inspect the buildings. A lot of you can tell if you can see roofs," said Barbara Grant, spokeswoman for Mayor John F. Street.

The mayor, who has been in office since January, made a \$250 million blight-removal program one of the centerpieces of his campaign. He has yet to get off the ground, but aides promised the money will be in place by fall.

In the meantime, Licenses and Inspections has been using what it calls "curbside demolition." When an inspector determines a house is about to collapse, the city asks demolition companies to submit bids on the spot. The low bidder begins work immediately.

From her stoop across the street, Velma McDuffy watched intently Monday afternoon as an excavator machine tore into the remains of a collapsed rowhouse. The abandoned buildings caved in last week, adding another sad chapter to the gradual, decades-long decline of McDuffy's North Philadelphia neighborhood.

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Judicial

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A federal judge has ordered a \$3.75 million settlement of health care claims from the dietitian who died in a plane crash, which was potentially fatal.

Women

demanded job security.

BATH, N.J. — A group of women, including works, builders, and others, walked in a demonstration in a demand for job security. About 80 members were in favor of the first walkout. Portela, a union leader, said a shipyard's closure would hurt the company and that the union would fight for the 4,800 employees. "We're back to the future," Sue Pieterse said. "The work at midnight is a reduction at yards that is a last straw." General D. walkout in "I want General D. ford it," Pi rigger, said arrived at w dozens of waved sign. At another nearly 3,000 Sunday ag plants of R at the com which mak missile. Ray fense prod tems are als Raythe the Intern of Electr 1505, said posals for don't do en ufacturing

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