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# Sanibel firefighters to get temporary hub after Ian totaled fire station

*Temporary housing arrives for Sanibel firefighters*



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More help is on the way to aid Sanibel firefighters after Hurricane Ian destroyed one of their two stations, with officials deeming it unlivable.

"We had to get a temporary housing structure in order for our firefighters to protect that district up in the District Two area," said Capt. John DiMaria, spokesperson for Sanibel Fire. "The reason for having to shut the Sanibel Causeway down is because unfortunately the lanes are a little too narrow for the structure to get through."

The temporary mobile home is 14 feet wide, said Sanibel Fire Chief Kevin Barbot. The causeway reopened about 1:30 p.m.

**Island reopening:** Sanibel welcomes visitors with open arms for first time since Ian destruction

**Back to the classroom:** Five months after Hurricane Ian, students return to The Sanibel School

"Our station is not livable. It is also not repairable," Barbot said. "This will be a temporary fire station that we will be living in for most likely two to three years."

Sanibel Fire Department Station 172, 5171 Sanibel Captiva Road, saw between 5 and 6 feet of water during Hurricane Ian's storm surge. The other station saw about 2 feet of water, DiMaria said.

The affected station is approximately 5 miles from the station they currently use, 2351 Palm Ridge Road, which sustained little damage compared to Station 172, DiMaria said.

DiMaria said Sanibel Fire doesn't yet know how much the repairs will cost. He added that the only other item that will need replacement is one of the support hazmat trucks.

"We're all having to be housed together right now," DiMaria said. "This temporary structure gets here ... Then we'll be able to provide both districts with the same quality of coverage that we did prior to the storm."

DiMaria said they continue to work 24-hour shifts with 48-hour breaks.

"It does not change the amount of time that we work, so that's all stayed the same," DiMaria said. "I think that every day that goes by, we're getting that to see somewhat of a sense of normalcy."

DiMaria said the temporary housing will improve island coverage, quality of service and faster response times.

"(We're) excited to get back to what we used to have, and that was having the two different stations that housed our firefighters," DiMaria said.

"Hopefully, as long as everything gets hooked up and everything is good to go with that," DiMaria said.

The temporary station could become available as early as next week, DiMaria said. The station will be rebuilt at the same location.

DiMaria and Barbot were among the earliest first responders on the island following Hurricane Ian's landfall. They worked in 6 inches of mud.

With most of their equipment a boat trip away or damaged, they relied on cars left in nearby neighborhoods to rescue those trapped in the rubble.

They rescued about 1,000 people.

After Ian hit the island, firefighters covered 12-hour shifts. They were home for between six and eight hours.

When their shifts ended, a boat would come pick them up.

## **Drought puts islanders at risk**

With the changes coming for Sanibel Fire, DiMaria emphasized the importance of dry season and the risk for fire hazards.

"We're still encouraging people not to burn any of their debris," DiMaria said. "Not to burn any horticulture because of the high fire danger that we're experiencing right now."

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