About 298 graves were disturbed in last month’s floods statewide, according to Health Department data.

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When the August floodwaters finally flowed out of Evening Star Baptist Church cemetery in Baker, some of the caskets – like boats washed ashore – had come to a stop at awkward angles, poking up out of their graves.

In one case, the flood was so powerful it unearthed a heavy vault – a concrete box that houses a casket – and tipped it over, allowing a body to fall out.

Many burial spots remained filled with brown water last week, some three weeks since floods engulfed houses and quietly dislodged hundreds of vaults across the state where the deceased had been laid to rest.

Evening Star Baptist Church cemetery was one of about 35 graveyards damaged in the flood, according to data from the state Department of Health. Less than a mile from the Comite River, Plainview Cemetery in Livingston Parish, one of about 35 graveyards damaged across the state during the flooding in August, is still waiting to dry out Thursday.

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which became so swollen it submerged parts of Baker and the surrounding area, the cemetery saw about 10 of its graves disturbed, by the state's count. Workers last week were using a hand-operated crane to lift vault lids and pump out water covering the caskets inside. A blue tarp had been slung over a grave where a man's remains had become exposed.

About 298 graves were disturbed in last month's floods statewide, Health Department data shows.

"When I first came out here, I found caskets all the way back in those woods," said Robert Williams, 71, gesturing to a forest adjacent to Evening Star Baptist Church.

Standing in the marshy grass last week, as belligerent insects swarmed, Williams said the caskets holding three of his uncles, two aunts, and a cousin-in-law were dislodged or washed away by the current.

They'll be reburied this time with water sloshing inside their caskets, which are sealed shut and can't be pumped out.

Williams is one of many in south Louisiana who now find themselves facing yet another after-effect of the flood: how to fix, and pay for, the burial sites of relatives they thought they'd long ago laid to rest.

Particularly at older cemeteries run by churches or families, the flood brought a sobering realization that there may be no way to know for sure that the graves of deceased loved ones will truly remain in peace decades into the future.

"We won't be burying any more family members in that area at that particular cemetery," Williams said.

There's nothing in state cemetery law that spells out who is responsible for making sure that graves are protected and repaired in perpetuity, said Louisiana Cemetery Board Director Lucy L. McCann.

And after the cemetery fees are paid and the funerals are finished, not even cemetery owners are required by law to guarantee that a casket will remain in place into the future or will be moved back to its spot if disturbed, McCann said.

But older burial grounds, like that of Evening Star Baptist Church, which has been around since 1895, have no such safety net.

"We don't have any type of escrow account set up for this church. The escrow account is the church itself," said Al Sanford, the pastor at Evening Star Baptist Church, which took on a foot of water.

Its pews had been excavated and were stacked in the church parking lot.

Sanford said he's hoping the Federal Emergency Management Agency will aid in the cemetery's repair. He said he doesn't want his church, which has 75 to 100 members and had to be gutted, to be liable for the cemetery damage.

"We might have to go back in debt to get refurbished," he said of the church. Sanford also said the church is no longer in touch with the families of some of those interned there.

It's unclear if FEMA will reimburse small cemeteries for damage in the recent floods. At least one FEMA guideline for the August 2016 floods said private and private nonprofit cemeteries are not eligible for public assistance. Another FEMA fact sheet states public and commercial cemeteries are not candidates for reimbursement.

The state Attorney General's Office is working with local coroners, the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and the state Cemetery Board to deal with flood-impaired graves. The state Department of Health is documenting the damage. But the actual maintenance of the graves is in the hands of individual cemeteries.

The problem is a recurring dilemma in floods. Hurricane Katrina uprooted some 1,500 graves in 2005, and Hurricane Ike, in 2008, disrupted some 200 burial spots, to cite just a couple storms.

In cities like New Orleans, much of which is below sea level, tombs are often installed above-ground because the water table is too shallow to allow deeply-dug graves.

But in the Baton Rouge area, for example, many caskets are placed in cement vaults that are wedged only a foot or so in dirt and are visible above ground.

"Placing burial vaults above ground or partially above ground is an aesthetic or cultural preference that has nothing to do with the law or the water table," said McCann, the Cemetery Board director.

She noted that the law requiring at least 2 feet of soil above caskets only applies to those not placed in vaults, but vaults may be placed in the ground or above the ground.

"It doesn't make me think that maybe it would be better if we went underground with them all," said Williams, the man looking after his relatives' graves at Evening Star Baptist Church.

Vaults at that site are visible above ground.

Over in Livingston Parish, Plainview Cemetery was quiet last week after about 50 of its caskets had been washed open by floods. Only Darlington Cemetery in St. Helena Parish, with 120 years old, alone on a residential street.

It appeared someone had been salvaging caskets and lining them up in rows, but many remained in disarray at Plainview Cemetery, with one casket suspended on its side, stuck to the top of an open vault.

The church that owns the graveyard, Roberts United Methodist Church, has long been in debt to get refurbished, he said.

Fred Banks, the chairman of the church's cemetery committee, said the graveyard needs some $150,000 to fix up the cemetery, which is also over 120 years old, alone on a residential street.

"Our forefathers did what they had to do, and we are just continuing the cycle, and we hope the next generation will do the same thing," he said.