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Humps of sand fill up homes

Sand from Ivan-leveled dunes ended up burying residents' belongings.

By [Antigone Barton](#)
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OKALOOSA ISLAND — The dune that last week blocked Shawn Mitchell's view of the water fills his living room now.

It's hard-packed, powder-white sand, 4 feet deep, hiding his furniture, making a high, hilly new floor that forces him to crouch under his ceiling.



Lannis Waters/The Palm Beach Post

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Shawn Mitchell stands on a 4-foot-deep pile of sand that forces him to crouch under his ceiling while moving a mattress Sunday. He was trying to get to a bedroom, which also was filled with sand.

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The chandelier that still hangs from the ceiling swings against his waist.

Mitchell was one of a stream of island residents allowed to dig out what they could from their homes Sunday, five days after they fled the island just south of Fort Walton Beach to make room for Ivan.

Authorities said no one on the island was killed or injured in the rampage of wind and waves that tore off roofs, smashed through doors, hurled appliances out into the street and leveled dunes, filling first-floor apartments with mountains of powder that left only corners of upper floors to show that these had once been homes.

On Sunday, Mitchell, carrying out two pictures, said he planned to rebuild his first-floor apartment at Island Sands from the cement walls out, when he gets his insurance check.

Anise and Benjamin Millership were not as lucky. They moved into their apartment a little month ago, when storms hovering in the Atlantic prompted insurance agents to put all new homeowners policies on hold.

Benjamin Millership stood on the beach with his back to the water, staring into his apartment searching for signs under the sand of the clothes, furniture, linens he left behind.

"There's nothing," he said, "nothing left at all."

Millership, a mortgage broker, and his wife moved to the island after an idyllic vacation there that persuaded them to return for good.

"We said: Life's too short. Let's spend it in paradise," Millership said.

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He ducked under a doorway, searching for his blue chair.

He knows where the washer, kitchen sink and futon frame are. The 130 mph winds hurle into the parking lot.

The linens the couple put in the bathtub are probably still there, he said. But he can't open because it is blocked by a wall of sand that filled the bathroom — blasted in through a crack.

Upstairs, the apartment that Diane Dial finished remodeling — and moved into two days storm forced her out — is untouched. But the roof of the building lies over the sand-filled pool now, and when the rain expected in the next few days comes she knows her ceiling is gone.

Her eyes red from crying, the 23-year island resident thinks about the happy few days she spent in her new apartment, and she plans to return.

"The rest of my life, as long as I'm living and breathing, I'll have a place on this beach. It's just a matter of when," she said. "Until the storm comes."

In her car, waiting for police to usher her over the bridge to the island, Cindy Pettay knew the storm did not expend all its force on her beachfront home. The night before, she said, she called her sister in Florida.

Jewett, Ohio, and learned that Ivan left traffic lights, stores and homes there under water. And that at least 52 people had died in the storm, including 16 in Florida.

"I got to crying because I can't get into my home," she said. "My sister put it in perspective."