

Tornado kills 22 in US Midwest

Joanne Laurier
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A tornado ripped through parts of Indiana and Kentucky early Sunday morning, killing at least 22 people and injuring more than 200. Another 200 people are still unaccounted for, with search efforts centering on the Eastbrook Mobile Home Park in Evansville, Indiana, which suffered the heaviest casualties.

Eighteen fatalities, ranging from children aged two, five and six to a 78-year-old man, occurred at the mobile home park, located in Vanderburgh County some eight miles southeast of downtown Evansville. Out of the park's 326 units, 140 homes were damaged or destroyed. "They [the deceased] were in trailer homes, homes that were just torn apart by the storm," said Deputy Vanderburgh County Coroner Annie Groves.

Another four deaths were reported in Warrick County, just east of Evansville. Cheryl Warren, a dental assistant who was eight months pregnant, her husband Jerry, a truck driver, and their four-year-old son were killed when their mobile home in Degonia Springs collapsed on them. A teenage girl was also killed near Boonville. No deaths were immediately reported in Kentucky.

"We could hear people screaming for help, screaming that they were trapped," said Amy Lamastus, 27, whose trailer at the Eastbrook Park, which she shared with Ryan Belwood, was torn off its foundations. Lamastus is a customer service representative for a credit card company.

Added Belwood, 26, a factory press operator: "It was as if someone had reached down with a giant hand on top of the trailer and we started rocking back and forth...You started smelling the gas. It was so thick you couldn't breathe. You could hear the gas hissing out like a broken fire hose."

Tim Martin, 42, said he and his parents were awakened by the storm, which lifted their mobile home and moved it into a neighbor's yard. They escaped

unharmed but said they heard cries from several people calling for help.

Twelve hours after the tornado struck, emergency crews found an eight-year-old boy alive under layers of debris. Chief Jerry Bulger of the German Township Fire Department in Indiana said that it was unlikely that the boy's family survived.

One of the two hospitals in Vanderburgh County was filled to capacity with private rooms accommodating multiple injured people. Joan Fulps and her husband survived after their home in the Evansville Mobile Home Park was picked up by strong wind and moved three to four streets. She is currently in hospital awaiting surgery.

Some workers were also injured at the Ellis Park racetrack, between Evansville and Henderson County, Kentucky. A separate tornado hit downtown Munfordville, Kentucky, causing significant damage to more than 40 homes and businesses.

The utility company Vectren reported that 25,000 homes were without power Sunday and there were also reports of natural gas leaks.

"This is the worst I've seen in 28 years," stated Joanne Smith, the Vanderburgh County Emergency Operations Director. The tornado was the deadliest in Indiana since 1974. Sunday's tornado was also notable because such a strike is highly unusual this time of year. Tornadoes can occur anytime, but peak season in the US lasts from March through the summer months. The tornado was rated F3 on the Fujita scale, which ranges from F0, the weakest, to F5, the strongest, making it the most lethal tornado in the US since 1999.

National Weather Service officials said the tornado was formed in part because of the collision of a cold front moving into the Ohio River Valley with the recent uncharacteristically mild, humid weather. The twister, which packed winds of between 158 and 206 miles per hour, touched down in northwestern Kentucky, then

crossed the Ohio River and cut a 15- to 20-mile path through Indiana's Vanderburgh and Warrick counties.

Indiana officials said tornado warning sirens sounded twice, but many in the mobile home park did not hear them. "They're not designed to wake people up in the middle of the night," said John Buckman of the German Township Fire Department. Many of the survivors complained of either not hearing the sirens or only hearing them shortly before disaster struck. They told of trying to seek shelter as their homes blew up around them.

"It exploded, it just exploded, and other people's trailers were inside of ours," Stacy Wright told "CBS News". "We found kids inside our trailer buried under our stuff."

A local emergency board member, cited in the *Evansville Courier & Press*, noted that five years ago officials looked into a system that would automatically ring telephones in neighborhoods known to be in the path of a tornado, but rejected it because the cost was several million dollars.

President George W. Bush, speaking from Panama, told reporters that he called Indiana Governor Mitchell Daniels to ask him if more federal action was needed. "He felt like the response that we had given was appropriate at the time. And many Americans are now asking God's blessing on those who suffered through the natural disaster," said Bush.

Some 130 Indiana National Guard troops were called in by the governor to provide security and assist in recovery efforts.

Mobile homes, prefabricated low-cost housing units made without basements, are particularly vulnerable to tornadoes. Through September 2005 there had been 10 tornado deaths this year—eight of them among people living in mobile homes.

According to a study by the Department of Economics at the University of Oklahoma, 42.5 percent of US tornado fatalities occurred in mobile homes between 1985 and 2003, a remarkable figure given that this type of home comprises only a small percentage of total housing. The report estimates that residents of mobile homes may face a risk of death *fifteen times greater* than residents of permanent homes.

The "mobile home problem" in relationship to tornadoes is of particular concern because of the increase over the last 50 years in the percentage of the

population living in mobile homes. Mobile homes comprised only 0.7 percent of housing units in 1950, but increased to 7.5 percent in 2000. "Also of concern is the concentration of mobile homes in tornado-prone states in the southeastern United States," state the report's authors. This tends to "halt the decades long downward trend in the annual tornado fatality rate."

Debra Jorden, a secretary who lived in the Evansville's Eastbrook Mobile Home Park, said: "I'm so afraid because I don't know where my neighbors are at, and this is a close community, mostly retirees and young families. There are so many kids here. No one knows who's dead and who's alive."



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