

Tornadoes kill dozens in US

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A powerful storm system swept across the middle section of the United States late last week, spawning over 240 tornadoes and leaving more than 43 people killed and 130 injured at the time of this writing. The storm raged from Oklahoma and Arkansas on Thursday, into Mississippi and Alabama on Friday, passing through North Carolina and Virginia on Saturday afternoon before moving into the Atlantic that evening.

A powerful jet stream, high humidity and a large cold front combined to make near perfect conditions for thunderstorms and tornadoes. Residents told horror stories about baseball-sized hail, flash floods and howling tornadoes. The tornadoes destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes, businesses and public buildings and left 400,000 without power.

As is routinely the case the victims of the disaster were primarily low-income families whose houses—often mobile homes—offered little or no protection from the deadly winds, falling trees and flying debris.

The storm killed two people in Oklahoma and seven in Arkansas. Lightning struck a tree in Garland County, Arkansas, which crushed a mobile home, killing the residents, a 24-year-old man and his 18-month-old daughter.

By Friday morning the storm system generated tornadoes near Jackson, Mississippi, killing one person, injuring several others and causing widespread damage to homes and other buildings, tearing roofs off in some cases. By mid-afternoon there were more than two dozen reports of tornadoes from central Mississippi into southwestern and west-central Alabama. One Alabama man was killed when his mobile home was thrown

across a major highway while he was still inside.

The central and northern counties of North Carolina experienced some of the most intense weather. At least 21 people were killed Saturday, making it the deadliest day for tornadoes in the state since 1984, when 22 twisters killed 42 people and injured hundreds.

Scott Sharp, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service office in Raleigh, described a “family of tornadoes” that were part of the same system, with one rotating updraft coming about after another had dissipated. He said at least eight tornadoes hit the state. One formed south of Raleigh, the state capital and home to 400,000 residents, forcing closure of downtown streets until Sunday. Three family members perished when a tornado destroyed their mobile home.

Residents of the same mobile home park described a deadly scene. Angelina McCaizie told ABC News that she and her husband found neighbors with broken bones and severe bleeding begging for medical attention.

At the Cedar Creek Mobile Home Park in Dunn, south of Raleigh, one woman died while another man was critically hurt when a car landed atop him outside his home. More than half the 40 homes in the park were totally destroyed.

In Bladen County—where more than 25 percent of the population lives in poverty—a 92-year-old father and his 50-year-old son were killed when they were thrown from their mobile homes.

Audrey McKoy, also from Bladen County, was with her husband when a tornado took a turn toward her mobile home. “It looked just like *The Wizard of Oz*,”

she told the local Fox News affiliate.

The report continued, “The two hid in their laundry room and heard snapping trees and other homes being destroyed around them. When they stepped out to see the damage, it took them a moment to realize the twister had turned their own home around, leaving them in the backyard.”

Virginia saw flash floods and tornadoes in the central and coastal regions, leaving four dead and 60 injured.

While the storm system was particularly forceful, generating devastating tornadoes that claimed many lives, it also underscored how vulnerable large parts of the American population are, particularly in regard to housing.

Studies show that mobile homes account for nearly half of all deaths relating to tornadoes. But authorities have little to offer those living in such structures, recommending only that residents flee them entirely, even for an open field where they would crouch down!

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, most mobile homes roll over in the face of winds 60 to 70 miles per hour. In the strongest parts of a tornado, mobile homes simply disintegrate, affording no shelter to their occupants. Mobile homes house an increasing number of working people who can afford only the most modest shelter.



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