

Stage collapse kills five at Indiana state fair

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Five people were killed and 45 were injured after stage scaffolding collapsed during a concert at the Indiana State Fair in Indianapolis Saturday night. The stage was blown down onto the audience by strong winds. The crowd of about 12,000 had been waiting through a weather delay to see the band Sugarland perform.

The stage collapsed at 8:49 p.m. In advance of a line of strong storms that evening, the National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm watch for all of central Indiana, and warned State Fair staff that it would strike by 9 p.m. The weather advisory predicted damaging winds up to 40 miles per hour, heavy rain, lightning, and hail measuring up to 2 inches in diameter. Wind gusts in excess of 75 miles per hour were reported.

As the storm bore down on the fairgrounds, the concert supervisors issued an advisory to spectators on evacuation procedures. In spite of advance warning of the approaching storm, fair organizers did nothing to ensure the safety of the crowd beyond advising people to seek shelter in the nearby swine house. The announcement came just four minutes before the collapse, according to a timeline compiled by the Indiana State Police.

“A big gust of wind came through. You could see a lot of people panicking,” Aaron Richman, a witness to the accident, told CNN. “All the scaffolding and speakers—all that came crashing down, and the whole stand just collapsed.” As a cloud of dust came billowing into the area and the sound of the wind rose, people began screaming. Many bystanders captured the accident on video (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Fourteen-year-old Tory Ison, who was injured, told local NBC-affiliate channel 13, “In the blink of an eye, it was just down. You see people underneath it, trying to get out, and little kids.”

Immediately afterward, the crowd rushed forward to

help victims. Many fashioned stretchers out of parts of seats and metal gates. Hundreds of people strained to lift the heavy rigging and retrieve the injured (see video from WISH-TV 8).

Fair Director Cindy Hoyer told the media that the company which owns the stage, Mid-America, would investigate the collapse.

The Marion County coroner’s office identified the victims as Tammy Vandam, 42, of Wanatah; Glenn Goodrich, 49, of Indianapolis; Alina Bigjohny, 23, of Fort Wayne; Christina Santiago, 29, of Chicago; and Nathan Byrd, a 51-year-old stage hand who was in the rigging at the time of the accident. Byrd died in the hospital overnight.

The *Indianapolis Star* reported ambulances backed up outside local hospital emergency rooms. At Wishard Memorial, “people sat in wheelchairs with blood on their heads and faces as medical staff did triage.” As of Sunday, many of those hospitalized remained there. In addition to victims who were hospitalized, 150 others were treated for injuries at makeshift triage centers at the scene.

The fairgrounds were closed on Sunday. Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels described the disaster as a freak accident and suggested that nothing could have been done to prevent it. “This is the finest event of its kind in America, this is the finest one we’ve ever had, and this desperately sad, as far as I can tell fluke event, doesn’t change that,” he commented during a press conference Sunday.

Powerful storm systems are common in Indiana, and outdoor events have been struck before. In May, the Indianapolis 500 race—attended by as many as 400,000 people—was interrupted by storms and tornado warnings. The 2004 Indianapolis 500 was similarly interrupted by a severe thunderstorm; as thousands of spectators were leaving the Motor Speedway, a tornado touched down within ten miles of the track.

In 2006, tornadoes tore across central Indiana and blew windows out of downtown Indianapolis office buildings onto thousands of concertgoers as they departed from a John Mellencamp concert at Monument Circle.



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