

Tornado damages 100 homes in Michigan community

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A tornado touched down in Dexter, Michigan on Thursday evening, causing extensive property damage though apparently no serious injuries.

Damage was concentrated in the Huron Farms subdivision where one house was completely destroyed and several dozen sustained collapses of walls and roofs. Properties affected by Thursday's tornado, however, extended throughout the region. Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office Director Derrick Jackson told the Detroit Free Press that a dozen homes were destroyed in Dexter Township and Dexter Village. More than one hundred homes were damaged in total.

The storm had not been officially categorized on Friday afternoon, but the National Weather Service was leaning towards a designation of "F3," meaning "severe" with winds between 158 and 206mph. The last storm of such magnitude in Michigan took place in 1997.

Dexter Township is home to just 5,000 residents, many of whom work in nearby (and larger) Ann Arbor. The median household income in the township was \$75,000 in the year 2000. Only 1.8 percent were below the federal poverty rate. In Dexter Village, however, where there are 4,000 residents, the median household income is much lower—just \$57,000. The Huron Farms subdivision lies within Dexter Village.

The Huron Farms subdivision consists of single-family homes built about a decade ago. Many saw brief rises in their values followed by a sharp decline during the property value collapse of 2005-2008. One resident told these the WSWs that several of the homes were in foreclosure. "The mortgage crisis hit this area very hard," he said.

At the same time, the level of material support provided to Dexter residents stood in something of a contrast to that offered to the victims of similar

tragedies that have swept more rural areas and inner-cities in the US. By mid-afternoon Friday, extensive resources had been mobilized to clean and repair the damaged properties in Huron Farms. Front-loaders cleared the remains of the destroyed house and removed it in 30-yard dumpsters.

The subdivision was crowded with the vans of property restoration companies like Belfor, Jarvis, ISC and Statewide. Contractors, disaster relief experts and volunteers easily outnumbered residents, judging by interviews done at random in the neighborhood.

We first spoke with a couple who were walking their child near the destroyed home. Alex works at a restaurant in nearby Ann Arbor. He came to survey the damage out of concern for his manager who lives in Dexter and who left work early yesterday to get home before the storm reached. Lauren works at a hospital in Ann Arbor. They pushed Aiden in a stroller through the damaged neighborhood and spoke of their relief at the apparent lack of human injury and their sense of concern for the community.

We next spoke with Cortney, who was with her son Calvin, age five. They had come from the neighborhood across Dexter-Ann Arbor Road to help with the cleanup. They had been home as the tornado touched down and remained in their basement.

"There was a lot of hail against the windows, and the storm moved the heavy deck furniture that normally takes two people to move," Cortney said. The public warning system gave more than 20 minutes notice according to reports in the local press, a point that Cortney confirmed. "There was a lot of warning," she remarked. She also commented on the relatively quick mobilization of cleanup crews and supplies.

"Busch's [the nearby grocery store] was mobilized by 8 pm [about 90 minutes after the tornado]" and

provided free water and food to residents. She mentioned that local farmers spontaneously brought heavy equipment to help move debris, and that high-school students came today to help with cleanup. “This is a wonderful town. There are so many people who care,” she added.

We asked a representative of Belfor if he was aware of any residents who might not have insurance coverage. He replied that it was too early to know for certain because residents with lapsed or limited policies may not yet be aware of their potential liability.

The subdivision was visited by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder who undoubtedly saw an opportunity to appear sympathetic without having to commit any state funds for relief. The governor has presided over continuous budget cuts since his inauguration in January 2011. He is currently working with Democratic Party leaders to push through draconian budget cuts in Detroit.



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