

At least five dead in US tornado outbreak

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More than 100 tornadoes swept across the central US over the weekend, killing at least five people, injuring dozens, and destroying communities. Hundreds of thousands of people remain without power in Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska.

Five people were killed after a tornado struck Woodward, Oklahoma early Sunday morning. A trailer park at the edge of the town was hardest hit. Twenty-nine people were treated for injuries, including five in critical condition who were transferred to other hospitals. Three children were among the dead. Another child remains missing.

Woodward Mayor Roscoe Hill told the press that the west and north sides of the city were also devastated. Some residents remain trapped in the rubble of an apartment complex. "On the west part of town it looks pretty bad," Hill said. "We still have search and rescue people out. We have people who are still missing. It's pretty devastating."

Hill said he did not hear the warning sirens go off, and suggested a power outage was to blame. Woodward County Emergency Manager Matt Lehenbauer told the *Oklahoman* newspaper that the sirens were activated, but because the storm formed so quickly, residents got only three minutes of warning.

An American Red Cross spokesperson said the town's emergency responders were overwhelmed by the disaster. A shelter has been set up in a church, and food, water, cots and other essentials were being sent from Oklahoma City. Some 8,000 people are without power.

Many residents are picking through debris for a few undamaged belongings. Irma Sanchez told the *Oklahoman* that all she could salvage from her brother's trailer was a family Bible. "We had our brother out just in time," she commented. "He's handicapped. He lost all he had."

The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction

Center warned that the storm system carried the possibility of a "high-end, life-threatening event." There were few precautions that residents in trailers or other unsafe housing could take to prepare, however, beyond watching the weather forecasts and huddling in closets and bathtubs.

Forecasters said that tornadoes were developing too swiftly for them to count. By early Sunday, the NWS recorded 120 tornadoes.

On Friday, a tornado hit the city of Norman, Oklahoma. In issuing a warning, the local fire chief emphasized that the town's public shelters were not federally approved, making them no safer than a home. Nineteen people were injured in the tornado, and 4,500 homes were without power.

The small community of Thurman, Iowa was described as 75 percent destroyed. Officials have put the area on lockdown and said residents have taken refuge in the city hall, the only building in town with power.

Wichita, Kansas was declared a disaster area after being struck late Saturday night. Preliminary damage estimates are already upwards of \$280 million.

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Again, a trailer park was the worst impacted. No deaths or injuries were reported there, in part because the park had a community shelter. At least 75 of the 100 residents rushed inside. The *Wichita Eagle* reports that 100 trailers had been damaged.

"I didn't think it was that bad until I walked down my street and everything is gone," Yvonne Tucker told the Associated Press. "I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. I've seen it on TV, but when it happens to you it is unreal. I just feel lost."

Wheelchair-bound resident Kristin Dean said she had been able to grab only one bag of her possessions before being wheeled by others to the shelter. Her home

was obliterated. When residents emerged from the shelter, she said some trailers were on fire and others were simply gone. Power lines were down and the area smelled like natural gas. Nearby Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems plants were heavily damaged.

In the neighborhood of Oaklawn, the *Wichita Eagle* reported that two residents were transported by ambulance, “while many others were injured but did not go to the hospital.” Local television channel KAKE reporter Parrish Alleman posted an update on Twitter from Oaklawn describing the scene as “uncontrolled chaos. Downed power lines, gas leaks, paramedics can’t get through to homes.”

This year has already seen more than 60 tornado deaths across the US. Last year at least 550 people were killed in tornado outbreaks.



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