

Deadly storm system hits multiple US states

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An unusually strong fall storm system swept through 12 US states on Sunday, affecting some 53 million people. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), the storms caused 81 tornadoes that leveled hundreds of homes. High winds also damaged buildings, took down power lines, and felled trees. Six people are reported dead in Illinois, and two in Michigan, and at least 47 are reported injured. Significant sections of the Midwest were still without power.

Areas in Illinois around the towns of Pekin and Washington were hit by a line of tornadoes on Sunday morning. Entire city blocks have been flattened and reduced to rubble.

Many roads remain impassable and high winds and the leveling of buildings has made damage difficult to estimate. This afternoon, search and rescue, and road clearing efforts were still underway.

A very strong low-pressure system caused the unusually severe November thunderstorms to develop alongside a cold front that began in the Midwest and moved eastward. Bill Bunting, forecast branch chief at the NWS Storm Prediction Center, compared the storm to the fast-moving derecho storm that knocked out power to more than 4.2 million people and killed 22 in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions in June 2012.

Speaking to the WSWs, Illinois Office of Emergency Management spokesperson Patti Thompson said an estimated 500 to 700 people in Illinois have been displaced or made homeless. The actual number is likely far higher.

“Life safety has been our focus primarily,” she said. “Figuring out how many homes are gone is hard. That there was such total destruction in places like Washington makes it very hard.”

Gary Manier, mayor of Washington, reported between 250 and 500 houses have been destroyed. He told the *Chicago Tribune*, “I can’t imagine people

walked away from these places.”

At least 50 mobile homes were destroyed in Brookport, located in the southern portion of Illinois, bordering Kentucky. NBC reports that police with dogs were going door to door in the town and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was in place. A curfew was also imposed on the town of Washington, where the Illinois National Guard deployed firefighters for search and rescue.

The storm system also created tornadoes in Bone Gap and Miller City, Illinois, in Mount Carmel, Noblesville, and Vincennes in Indiana, and in Paducah, Kentucky, according to the NWS.

Towns in southwestern and central Indiana have sustained significant damage and 12 counties have reported either tornado touchdowns or major storm damage. Tornadoes were also spotted in eight Kentucky counties, a spokesman for the Kentucky Emergency Management said.

On Monday morning, a total of about 800,000 residences and businesses were without power in the US Midwest and the province of Ontario, Canada. In Michigan alone, 500,000 were without power. More than 100 schools are closed in Detroit, in addition to those closed in central and western Michigan. Power to some residents in the Detroit area is not expected to be returned for several days.

Over 83,000 customers were without power in Illinois. Around 37,000 power outages were reported in Missouri, mostly in the St. Louis area, according to Ameren, the Missouri electricity company. Over 11,000 have been affected by power outages in Indiana as well. In Ohio, over 38,000 are estimated to be without power as heavy winds rolled through and caused damage to buildings and infrastructure.

Last night’s fast-moving line of storms compounded the already deep social crisis in rural areas of Illinois and Michigan, where the population is dispersed, infrastructure is decayed, and it is common for people

to live in trailers or other insubstantial housing. Around 33 percent of the population of Illinois live in poverty or near poverty, and 7 percent of the state live in extreme poverty. Michigan's official poverty rate stands at 17.5 percent.

There is little doubt that many lives could have been saved if adequate infrastructure existed, including tornado-safe homes and buildings. As it is, many hundreds of people have lost everything, with little hope of receiving more than a pittance in state aid.



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