

Deadly storms across the southern United States

Kevin Martinez
25 February 2016

Powerful storms devastated several southern states Tuesday night tearing apart homes and downing power lines. There were 27 reported tornadoes in five states in just 24 hours. According to the National Weather Service there were 11 tornadoes in Louisiana, five in Mississippi and Florida and one in Georgia.

The worst hit by the storm were working class communities who had little time to prepare for such an emergency and whose homes could not withstand a powerful storm. The majority of the damage from Tuesday night occurred in the Louisiana towns of Convent and Paincourtville, Lamar County in Mississippi and Pensacola, Florida.

Florida Governor Rick Scott said in a press conference Wednesday morning that in the state's Escambia County more than 70 homes were destroyed and 2,700 homes were without power. Three people were hospitalized with minor injuries.

One person was reported dead in Lamar County, Mississippi, which was confirmed by the county coroner as a result of the storm. At least two people died, 30 were taken to the hospital and 100 residential trailers were damaged after a tornado tore apart the Sugar Hill RV Park near Convent, Louisiana.

The St. James Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness said that first responders were still going door to door in the park in search of survivors. Of those hospitalized, seven were listed as critical.

Rescue teams with search dogs looked around the remains of the park for any of the approximately 300 people who live there. Ambulances carried more than two dozen people from the scene. St. James Sheriff Willy Martin said he was still trying to determine how many people had made it to the hospital by other means.

An estimated 160 RVs and campers were at the park

when the tornado hit. Governor John Bel Edwards toured the park Tuesday evening and declared an emergency in St. James and six other parishes.

At least 15 tornadoes were reported in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama by the Storm Prediction Center. Due to the severe weather both Mississippi and Alabama were under states of emergency.

In Louisiana, waterspouts were reported over Lake Pontchartrain as the first report of severe weather started to come in. Tornado warnings were issued near the New Orleans airport and in the nearby St. Charles Parish. A tornado ripped through Prairieville, southeast of Baton Rouge, tearing the roof off a Gold's Gym, but there were no reports of injuries.

Another tornado destroyed 24 units and damaged six others at The Moorings Apartments in Pensacola, Florida. Six people were reported injured and emergency crews were performing search and rescue.

Madeline Santiago and Lee Sheffield were at the apartments when the tornado hit, telling *USA Today*, "We were watching TV and the lights blinked three times. We heard a train noise and a bunch of hollering. We didn't know it was coming."

While they made it out safe, the top floor of their apartment is in ruins and the downstairs is severely damaged. Santiago said weeping, "I don't have nowhere to go. I don't have my apartment anymore."

Officials say that the timing of the storm prevented a greater tragedy. Captain Craig Ammons with Escambia County Fire Training told local news, "Most people were probably just finishing up with dinner, relaxing, watching TV. It being a two-story apartment the bedrooms were all upstairs and that's where the most significant amount of damage was. If it was an hour or two later we probably would have a lot different story."

According to the National Weather Service more than

7 million people in the south were at risk of being impacted by severe weather. The weather service issued a tornado watch, where conditions are most favorable to develop tornadoes, for most of eastern Louisiana, southern Mississippi and southern Alabama.

More than 88 million people were at risk of being caught in severe weather as the storms moved toward the East Coast. The larger metro areas at risk included Richmond, Virginia and Raleigh, North Carolina. Winds of 70 miles per hour or greater have been reported.

Flash flood watches were issued in Alabama and Georgia after the storms dumped several inches of water there and elsewhere. In parts of Georgia, Florida and South Carolina schools were closed ahead of the storms.

On Wednesday the storm moved on to the East Coast where a possible tornado hit Waverly, Virginia in the afternoon, killing at least two people according to the Associated Press. Tornado watches were posted from South Carolina to New Jersey.

The horrible weather conditions have led to 1,500 cancelled flights by Wednesday afternoon with Chicago's O'Hare International Airport cancelling more than 750 flights alone. In Georgia, more than 20,000 customers were left without power after Tuesday's storms according to utility companies.

The average number of tornadoes in February is 29, mostly in the Deep South, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information. The historic poverty associated with the area and the limited amount of funds for emergency relief means that such natural disasters routinely result in man-made disasters.



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