

Widespread damage in Dayton, Ohio area after series of tornadoes

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A series of tornadoes late Monday night caused widespread damage in the Dayton, Ohio, area; at least one death and 130 injuries have been reported.

Eighty-one-year-old Melvin Dale Hanna in the city of Celina, an hour's drive northwest of Dayton, died after the storm picked up a vehicle and hurled it into his house. At least seven people were injured, three of them seriously, and 40 homes destroyed or seriously damaged in the city of 10,000.

In Dayton itself several tornadoes hit heavily populated parts of the city, causing extensive damage, but fortunately no deaths have been reported at this point. Injured residents had to be pulled out of heavily damaged buildings after the storm. Images published after the winds hit show heavily damaged neighborhoods littered with debris and rooftops torn clear off apartments. Local officials said it was highly fortunate no one was killed and apparently most residents promptly heeded tornado warning sirens and sought cover.

There were stories of narrow escapes, with residents taking shelter in basements only seconds before their homes were destroyed.

The roof of a high school in the Dayton suburb of Brookville was ripped off and a 30,000 square foot sports complex in Dayton was destroyed. Drone video of the city showed swathes of homes and businesses completely flattened or heavily damaged with debris strewn over wide areas.

Some 55,000 residents lost power in Dayton and city officials issued a boil water advisory after the winds knocked out power to water plants and pump stations. Public schools were closed Tuesday.

The National Weather Service Office in Wilmington, Ohio, estimated that at the height of the storms 5 million people were without power.

The town of Pendleton, Indiana, about 100 miles west of Dayton, also sustained heavy damage.

The Ohio tornadoes are the latest in an unusual string of severe weather events. According to federal weather officials, a preliminary assessment shows there were 500 tornadoes in a 30-day period, causing at least seven deaths and scores of injuries. According to the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center, Monday was the eleventh consecutive day with at least eight tornado reports, tying a record.

The relatively low death toll Monday night can at least in part be attributed to the storms hitting urban areas with permanent structures. Typically, the most dangerous place to be in a tornado is a trailer or mobile home, often the only affordable housing option for lower-income families.

Statistics collected between 2001 and 2010 showed that residents of mobile homes die in tornadoes at a rate 15 times higher than residents of permanent structures. Emergency officials typically advise mobile home residents to get out as fast as they can if a storm approaches.

Over the past weekend a tornado hit a mobile home park near Oklahoma City, killing two people and injuring another 29. Some of those injured were deemed critical. The storm flipped trailers and tossed some on top of others, trapping people inside.

Last week tornadoes ripped through central Missouri, causing widespread damage. Three people died in the storms. Among those dead was Betty Berg, 56, who was with her husband when a tornado ripped their mobile home off its foundations and flung it across a nearby highway, where it broke into pieces. Her husband Mark Berg, also 56, was hospitalized in critical condition.

In the wake of Monday's storm Ohio's Republican

Governor Mike Dewine offered empty words of sympathy for tornado victims but made no concrete pledge of financial support for families that had lost their homes and belongings. President Donald Trump also offered pro forma “support” to recovery efforts.

As with previous disasters, residents of Dayton will be left to fend for themselves after a brief spate of press coverage, shouldering the immense burden of trying to reconstruct their lives with little or no assistance from the state.

Across the US—from Puerto Rico, devastated in 2017 by Hurricane Maria, to cities destroyed by last year’s California wildfires—residents are still waiting for disaster relief. A disaster relief bill has been stalled in Congress for six months in part due to the Trump administration’s insistence that Puerto Rico not receive any additional aid.

While referred to as natural disasters or even acts of God, severe weather events like tornadoes are predictable and can be prepared for. However, far too little is done to guard against such catastrophes, with large sections of the population, generally the poorest and most vulnerable, left to fend for themselves.

Dayton, current population about 140,000, is a former center of the General Motors empire that in previous decades has been devastated by plant closures and the virtual shutdown of its manufacturing base. Large sections of the city’s population have been impoverished, with severe blight evident in some neighborhoods.

The destruction in Dayton and surrounding areas compounds the social devastation caused by the systematic dismantling of industry. Today the biggest employer in the region is the US military, which operates Wright Patterson Air Force Base.

As higher-paid industrial jobs disappeared, Ohio became a center of the opioid crisis in the United States. The sharpest increase in drug overdose deaths has been related to the use of the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl. In 2017 alone there were 3,572 deaths from synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl, recorded in Ohio, compared to 28,869 nationally. Thus, Ohio, with less than 4 percent of the US population, accounted for over 10 percent of the total US deaths from synthetic opioids.

According to data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention obtained by the *Washington*

Post, five of the 10 locations with the highest per-capita death rates for fentanyl-related drug overdose deaths are in Ohio. Fayette County, southeast of Dayton, has the seventh highest per-capita fentanyl death rate in the US. In 2017 Montgomery County, which encompasses Dayton, had the highest opioid death rate in Ohio and one of the highest in the US, a staggering 548 deaths. Though the death rate has fallen recently, the county recorded some 72 opioid deaths through March 2019.

Many Ohio communities report that the cost of dealing with the opioid crisis is draining money from budgets and impacting funding of other services. Threatened federal cuts in Medicaid would be disastrous.

Disasters such as tornadoes and hurricanes can often disrupt mental health and substance addiction treatment, a situation that can lead to health complications and relapse. The stress of such events can also lead to people relapsing to drug use to deal with anxiety.

The response to disasters requires a coordinated and highly organized marshaling of society’s resources. However, by subordinating every facet of social and economic life to the accumulation of private wealth, capitalism blocks even the most elementary steps needed to safeguard human life and help disaster victims recover.



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