

Tropical Storm Claudette claims 13 lives in Alabama

Cordell Gascoigne**21 June 2021**

Storm Claudette regained its tropical storm status Monday morning as it neared the coast of the states of North and South Carolina after making its way through Alabama over the weekend. The storm left behind a trail of death and destruction leaving at least 13 dead, including numerous children. Claudette produced multiple tornadoes, flooding on the Gulf Coast, and is linked to a multi-vehicle wreck in Alabama which killed nine children and one adult.

The 18-vehicle crash occurred on Interstate 65 around 2:30 p.m. on Saturday in Butler County, located 57 miles south of Montgomery. Butler County coroner Wayne Garlock mentioned the location of the wreck is “notorious” for hydroplaning—occurring when the tires of a road vehicle, or any wheeled vehicle, experience a build-up of water between the wheels of the vehicle and the surface of the pavement, leading to a loss of traction that prevents the vehicle from responding appropriately to control inputs, most notably, brakes.

Alabama Sheriff’s Youth Ranches CEO Michael Smith told reporters one of their vans from the Girls Ranch was returning to the ranch near Camp Hill, located 63 miles northeast of Montgomery, after a week spent at the beach in Gulf Shores, southeast of Mobile. The ranch serves as a home for abused and neglected children across Alabama.

The van quickly caught fire after the wreck. A bystander immediately ran to the van, rescuing the ranch director and driver Candice Gulley, but the eight girls on board all died in the crash.

“This is the worst tragedy I’ve been a part of in my life,” said Smith, adding that two of the children who perished in the accident were Gulley’s own children. The crash also claimed the lives of two others who were in a separate vehicle. Garlock identified them as 29-year-old Cody Fox and his 9-month-old daughter,

Ariana, both of Marion County, Tennessee.

Moreover, a 24-year-old man and a 3-year-old boy were also killed Saturday when a tree, compromised by the storm’s high winds and heavy rain, fell on their house just outside of Tuscaloosa County.

Makayla Ross, a 23-year-old from Fort Payne, died Saturday after her car ran off the road into a rain-swollen creek containing more water than usual, flowing faster than normal. There were also search efforts in Pebble Creek for a man who is believed to have fallen into water during a flash flood in Birmingham.

The deaths occurred as heavy rain from the storm showered northern Alabama and Georgia late Saturday. According to local news reports, as much as 12 inches (30 centimeters) of rain was reported earlier from Claudette along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Claudette battered many southeastern states: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and the Florida Panhandle felt the storm’s fury when high winds tore roofs off houses, flipping an 18-wheeler and a mobile home. Flooding in Northport, Alabama, led to the rescue of more than 20 people. According to a National Hurricane Center (NHC) Sunday afternoon report, southeast Louisiana, southern Mississippi, southern Alabama, and the western Florida panhandle experienced rainfall between five and 10 inches (12.7cm to 25.4cm), while isolated areas potentially saw 15 inches (38.1cm).

Myriad flash flood watches were posted Sunday for eastern Georgia, the North Carolina coast and southern South Carolina and its coast. According to forecasters, a tropical storm warning was in effect from Little River Inlet, South Carolina to the town of Duck, North Carolina, while a tropical storm watch was issued from South Santee River, South Carolina to Little River

Inlet.

Claudette was expected to move into the Atlantic Ocean later in the morning, then travel near or south of Nova Scotia. On Tuesday, however, upon reclamation of its status as a tropical storm, Claudette reached maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (64 kmh), according to the NHC. According to forecasters, the storm was located 65 miles east-southeast of Raleigh, North Carolina (located 165.9 miles east of Charlotte) and moving east-northeast at 25 mph (15.5 kmh).

However, Claudette may be strengthened over the western Atlantic Ocean as early as Tuesday morning.



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