

Major storm system causes multiple tornadoes across US South, destroys neighborhood in New Orleans

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Two tornadoes touched down in the New Orleans area Tuesday night killing at least one person and injuring several more. Thousands were left without power as emergency response crews searched through the wreckage for survivors.

The one fatality in the neighborhood of Arabi was identified as 25-year-old Connor Lambert. According to St. Bernard Parish Sheriff James Pohmann, Lambert was killed by “multiple blunt force injuries” caused by debris generated by the storm.

Additional reports from residents indicated that a school bus had been flipped, buildings had been torn off of their foundations into the street, and that people had even been trapped inside of their bathrooms seeking shelter from the storm.

The weaker of the two tornadoes, an EF1 with wind speeds around 90 mph, left a 12-mile-long trail of destruction in the town of Lacombe in St. Tammany Parish north of the city. The most concentrated destruction was caused by an EF3 tornado, with winds ranging between 158-206 mph, that touched down in New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward before destroying much of the neighborhood of Arabi just east of the city center.

An estimated 250 structures were damaged or destroyed along the two mile trail cut by the tornado. Images of overturned cars and severely damaged buildings were reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the same part of the city nearly 20 years ago, in 2005. This part of the city was also hit hard by Hurricane Ida just last year.

To aid with road clearance and search and rescue, 300 National Guard troops were deployed to the area on Wednesday morning.

While more commonly known for hurricanes, the New Orleans area is no stranger to strong tornado events. According to the Tornado Archives, at least seven significant tornadoes (EF2 or higher) have struck the city since 1950. The most recent event was an EF3 tornado that cut through 10 miles along the eastern part of the metro area in 2017.

The latest tornado outbreak in New Orleans was part of a much broader system of strong weather that affected southern states from Texas to Georgia, and is expected to continue to the Atlantic coast, albeit at a much reduced strength.

More than 60 tornado warnings were issued across Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana on Monday alone, with 16 confirmed tornadoes in Texas throughout the day.

Severe weather first began in Texas at 3:41 p.m. local time when a tornado struck the town of Jacksboro, roughly 60 miles northwest of Fort Worth. Several buildings were damaged, including the local elementary school and high school. No injuries were reported.

By 6 p.m. that evening the system had moved east, spawning three more tornadoes near Round Rock and Granger, Texas, near the greater Austin area, and in Kingston, Oklahoma. Around this time large parts of the American South were put under advisory for moderate risk of severe thunderstorms and potential flooding events.

At least one other person was killed in Grayson County, Texas during these tornadoes, raising the total death toll to two for the entire storm system.

In a statement following the storms, Texas Governor Greg Abbott delivered a typical boilerplate response: “We are devastated by the tornadoes that have hit our

Texas communities, but remain confident and steadfast in our ability to rebuild together. Thank you to all emergency responders and members of the Jacksboro and Crockett communities who have come together to help both neighbors and strangers. As Texans, we have endured great storms before and have built back even stronger, and I have confidence in our ability to do so again.”

As the storm system moved into Louisiana it caused nearly 100,000 customers to lose power on Tuesday across Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi. The Louisiana energy company Entergy reported Wednesday that 3,700 people were still without power.

First responders were forced to navigate through downed power lines as they conducted searches for people trapped or injured during the storm.

Claudette Reuther, a St. Bernard Parish resident, told AccuWeather, “We’re both on the floor and it lasted probably a minute or two. It wasn’t real long, but at the same time it feels like it was forever. It was a horrendous experience. You could feel the whole home vibrating and you hear this constant roar noise. And then all of a sudden literally everything just went silent, complete dead.”

Christine Wiecek, a resident of Arabi, told CNN that she and her husband felt lucky to be alive. Their house sustained strong damage, with projectiles generated by the tornado punching holes through their roof.

“When the watch turned to a warning, I shut off the stove, we grabbed the cats, and went into an interior bathroom, the one room without windows,” said Wiecek. “Within two minutes, the storm was passing over us. It was really loud, the house shook, and we couldn’t stop the poor, startled cats from running around like crazy in the tiny space.

“I was sitting on the floor with my back against the door, and could feel wind coming under the door, even though the doors and windows were closed.”



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