

At least 32 people dead, hundreds injured after dozens of tornadoes, thunderstorms tear through US

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Dozens of people are dead, hundreds are injured and thousands more are without power and/or homeless, following a devastating weekend of storms that began on Friday night and tore through the Central and Southern United States on Saturday and Sunday.

The massive weather event produced upwards of 50 powerful tornadoes that touched down in at least 10 states, including Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Delaware.

The majority of these states are located in the region dubbed “Tornado Alley,” a loose geographic area that extends from Texas up to Canada where roughly a quarter or more of the deadliest and most powerful tornadoes are recorded every year. But the tornadoes also struck from Mississippi eastward, a region where such events are comparatively rarer.

While it is not possible to link individual weather events to climate change, there is no doubt that global warming is a major factor in the expansion of the tornado zone to include nearly half the continental United States, the greater length of the tornado “season”, and the increase in the clustering of tornadoes (the outbreak of more such storms in any single day).

In addition to tornadoes, severe winds, rain, golf ball-sized hail and lightning that produced flash fires was reported in several states, including Oklahoma and Texas. According to poweroutage.us, an aggregator of power outages across the country, as of this writing over 180,000 customers or upwards of half a million people are still without power. Major outages are ongoing in Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

On Sunday morning, President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration request from Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders after a tornado tore through Arkansas on Friday. In a press conference Saturday, the Republican governor said the tornado is responsible for the deaths of at least four people in Wynne, Arkansas, and one person in Little Rock.

It appears the most deaths occurred in the state of Tennessee,

where at least 15 people throughout the state are dead following the storms. The majority of those deaths, nine, were in McNairy County, a rural area some 100 miles east of Memphis. Deaths related to the storm were also reported in Shelby County (3), Henry County (1), Roane County (1) and Tipton County (1).

In McNairy County, 97-year-old Nell Daniel managed to ride out the storm in the bathroom of her home, which was one of the only rooms that was not destroyed.

“The house just lifted; it felt like it was gonna tear apart,” she told ABC 24. “It just terrified me to death. I was scared to death. I never went through anything like it.”

Nell had lived in her home for 64 years. However, the damage from the storm was so severe, her home will have to be demolished, leaving her homeless.

“My life is ruined. There’s nothing like it,” she said through tears, ABC reported.

Reflecting on the suddenness of the storm and the complete lack of warning given to residents, Jason Sullivan, another resident of McNairy County, told the local TV station, “I didn’t really know it was coming, I just ran in the house and got in the bathroom and waited it out...”

In Adamsville, Tennessee, on the border of McNairy and Hardin counties, the police department reported on Saturday that the “damage and loss that our community suffered last night was catastrophic.”

Despite the fact that this specific batch of storms were predicted days in advance and that tornadoes began touching down early Friday morning, governors in Indiana and Tennessee waited to issue national emergency declarations until the bodies started piling up on Saturday after the worst of the storms had already passed.

In southern Illinois late Friday night, an EF-3 tornado, which

carries with it three-second wind gusts from 135-165 miles per hour, touched down. The tornado crossed into Indiana and killed at least six people; dozens more were injured. Among the dead include a husband and wife, who were killed when the tornado passed through their campsite in Owen County, Indiana.

In Sullivan, Indiana, the local NBC affiliate WTWO/WAWV reported that once the tornado reached the city it “destroyed a large portion of the south end of town,” leaving at least 200 families displaced, out of a population of about 4,000 people.

Over the weekend, Sullivan Coroner Joe Coffman confirmed that the tornado claimed the lives of three residents of the town. Susan Kay Horton, 61, and her son Thomas Randall Horton, 38, were among the victims. On Sunday, Sullivan Mayor Clint Lamb confirmed that Shane Goodman, 47, also died in the storm. Goodman lived in a modular home, which, as of this writing, has yet to be found.

Over a dozen more Sullivan residents were severely injured in the storm. Many of them were injured when their homes collapsed on top of them.

For the hundreds of Sullivan residents who were left homeless following Friday’s tornado, Lamb advised that they could apply for a “30-day housing voucher” from the state of Indiana.

On Sunday afternoon, the National Weather Service said large parts of Illinois and Indiana, including areas recently affected by the storms, should expect “showers and thunderstorms” and warned that “damaging winds, large hail, and tornadoes, are all possible” beginning on Tuesday.

This past Friday night in Belvidere, Illinois, outside of Rockford, the storm is thought to have contributed to the partial collapse of the Apollo Theatre roof. This resulted in the death of at least one person and over 20 severe injuries. Bricks, lights and rebar came crashing down in the middle of a concert when an estimated 260 people were inside the venue, according to the fire department.

Belvidere is the site of a Stellantis car assembly plant which was recently closed at the cost of more than 1,300 jobs.

Some 850 miles east, in Greenwood, Delaware on Saturday, the National Weather Service confirmed that a tornado had touched down in Sussex County and caused severe damage. At least one person is confirmed dead, and nine injuries were reported. In addition to destroying homes in Greenwood, the storm uprooted trees and collapsed roofs, causing severe damage to residences in Bridgeville and Newark, Delaware and as far north as Philadelphia.

As with every “natural” disaster in the United States, the immediate effects of the massive storm were compounded by the social and economic conditions in the affected areas, which include large swaths of the deindustrialized Midwest.

Decades of economic insecurity, unemployment, substandard housing and the refusal of the US government, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, to invest in any meaningful emergency response or advanced warning systems has left millions of people at the mercy of increasingly more frequent and deadly storms.

While the United Kingdom, on average, has more tornadoes per square mile, the US far and away leads the world in actual number of tornadoes each year, with an average of over 1,200. Despite the frequency of tornadoes in the US, which in the last three years have killed an average of 64 people a year, capitalist politicians have done nothing to update infrastructure and building codes to require homes and businesses be built with designated safe rooms capable of withstanding the winds produced by these routine storms.

The technology and resources exist to safeguard the entire population from the effects of these predictable storms. However, under capitalism, the vast wealth produced by the working class is not used to improve their lives and society as a whole but instead is squandered on trillion-dollar war budgets, fascistic police departments, multinational corporations and bank bailouts.

It is only through the building of an independent socialist movement in the working class that the resources of society can be reallocated towards preventing these disasters and improving the lives of everyone, not just the rich and privileged.



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