

Tornadoes, severe storms hit Michigan, Ohio, Ontario, killing at least 5

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At least five people were killed and many more injured by a line of severe thunderstorms and tornadoes that rolled through southern Michigan, northern Ohio and southeastern Ontario last Thursday night (August 24) and early Friday morning.

The storms left a path of destruction in their wake, with significant damage to homes and major flooding of roads and communities. The severe weather, including at least seven separate tornadoes, toppled trees and downed power lines.

The storms left over 700,000 people without power in southern Michigan and northern Ohio. But power outages from similar storms were experienced as far east as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

While the confirmed tornadoes were on the low end with regard to intensity, they still packed wind speeds of between 80 and 110 miles per hour. One touched down in Kent County, Michigan, home to the city of Grand Rapids, and a second landed in rural Ingham County, not far from the Michigan state capital, Lansing.

Initially, the National Weather Service reported that two tornadoes had been confirmed, but the agency has since revised its report, saying it believes at least seven EF-0 and EF-1 tornadoes, as well as a possible EF-2, made ground contact.

Thursday's storms were the culmination of two days of severe weather that began Wednesday night with thunderstorms and intense lightning lasting several hours. The storms on Thursday were worse, accompanied by wind gusts of up to 70 miles per hour and torrential rains that created dangerous conditions for driving, especially on certain Michigan roads that are notorious for flooding even in a moderate rainfall.

Creeks and riverbanks overflowed. The city of Canton in western Wayne County, Michigan received

seven inches of rain in a short time period and in many areas was under water.

"The last two days have been extremely active compared to what we typically see in Michigan," said Steve Considine, a senior National Weather Service forecaster in White Lake Township.

It is likely that the severe weather is linked to the northward movement of the boundary between the persistent dome of extreme heat plaguing the American southwest and the relatively cooler air over the eastern Midwest and Great Lakes region. The meeting of these two very different air masses with regard to their temperatures created highly unstable conditions.

At least one of the fatalities has been linked to the tornado that hit Ingham County. An 84-year old woman died when a fallen tree landed on her house, according to Lansing police. In Kent County, a woman and two children, aged one and three, were killed in a head-on collision that occurred when a car hydroplaned on a flooded road. "There were two vehicles traveling toward each other," Sergeant Eric Brunner told WZZM-TV. "One hydroplaned on water and it was occupied by four people."

Another motorist was killed when his car flipped in a 25-car pile-up on Interstate 96, also in Ingham County. Tornadic winds were also responsible for accidents involving semi-trailers that smashed into guardrails on highways throughout southern Michigan. Detroit Metro Airport reported 60 flight delays and 23 cancellations during Thursday's storms.

The fatalities, however, were not the product simply of severe weather, as life-threatening as such storms can be. Tornadoes are not uncommon in Michigan. The deadliest funnel cloud to ever strike the state occurred 70 years ago in the Flint area, in June of 1953. That tornado killed 16 people and injured hundreds.

Last week's particularly destructive chain of events was exacerbated by a combination of deteriorating social conditions, poorly lighted and constructed roads with little to no drainage, crumbling infrastructure, and, most importantly, the callous indifference of the establishment political parties and the corporate entities masquerading as "public utilities."

One televised news report cited people who called DTE Energy to report power outages and were told to "call an electrician." DTE has an infamous record of shutting off power to customers while its top executives line their pockets with tens of millions of dollars.

The pledge of Governor Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, to "fix the damn roads!" has ended in a debacle. Michigan has some of the worst roads in the country, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers, which issued a grade of D- for Michigan roads in 2018.

The *Detroit Free Press* quoted Kelly Karll, the manager of the environment and infrastructure group at the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, as saying that most of southeast Michigan's stormwater conveyance systems were built around the end of World War II or even earlier, and designed for far milder precipitation totals. "The bottom line is, as we've been saying for years, our stormwater infrastructure needs are in a dire situation," Karll said.

Meanwhile, Whitmer's crash program to rebuild the roads and highways in Michigan has turned into a nightmare for drivers. Roads are suddenly closed without warning, explanation or even a sign. Orange barrels abound, but very often there are no work crews in sight.

There is an acute shortage of road crews, caused no doubt by the poor wages and conditions these workers confront, and the state refuses to offer a night-time differential so that some roads can be repaired more quickly by crews working 24/7. As a result, driving in bad weather becomes more hazardous.

The decrepit state of the overall infrastructure in Michigan was highlighted on May 19, 2020, after heavy rains caused the Edenville and Sandford Dams to burst, releasing Wixom Lake and producing a life-threatening flood that forced the evacuation of 10,000 residents. After almost four years, the state of Michigan has slated the dams for repair at some point between 2024 and 2026.

The same is true for the aging electrical infrastructure. It is dominated by above-ground utility poles and exposed transformers, which are easily damaged by falling trees and branches. The result is frequent blackouts triggered by even moderately severe weather events.

DTE Energy claims it does not have the funds for a more rational rebuilding of the infrastructure because of the company's "carbon reduction" efforts. Two months ago, after DTE announced that its summer "peak time" rate hikes were going into effect, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

That the utility claims that this new rate structure will take pressure off the electricity grid during those hours of peak usage is, in fact, an indictment of the overall decrepitude of the company's infrastructure. In the aftermath of last February's "historic" ice storm, over 700,000 Michigan residents lost power, with many not receiving electricity for nearly a week.

The WSWS pointed out that according to the Energy and Policy Institute, DTE Energy is "one of the most aggressively anti-consumer utilities in the country." The watchdog group noted that DTE is notorious for carrying out the highest number of residential electricity shutoffs in the country. Between January 2020 and October 2022, DTE cut off power to 377,492 of its customers.



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