

US storms death toll rises to 23 as NWS/NOAA cuts expected to affect ability to warn of danger

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Severe storms and flooding swept through the Southern and Midwestern US over the weekend, resulting in at least 23 fatalities in multiple states. Heavy rainfall, tornadoes and flash flooding hit the affected regions, resulting in significant damage and loss of life. The storms began in Oklahoma and Texas late last week before moving eastward over the weekend.

In Oklahoma, tornadoes and severe storms caused structural damage, including the destruction of homes and businesses.

On April 2, a likely tornado struck Owasso, a northeastern suburb of Tulsa and tore roofs off buildings, damaged homes and other structures, and downed power lines and trees. The same storm system produced a high-end EF1 tornado that traveled from northeast of Turley through Owasso to Limestone.

This tornado also damaged industrial buildings, affected several neighborhoods by damaging homes, uprooting trees, and snapping power poles. Another EF1 tornado touched down northwest of Pawhuska in Osage County, snapping multiple power poles.

The EF designation of tornadoes stands for Enhanced Fujita and each number represents a range of wind speeds. For example, an EF1 tornado has 3-second wind gusts of between 86 and 110 miles per hour while an EF5 has wind gusts over 200 miles per hour.

The storms and tornadoes knocked out power for over 162,000 residents across Arkansas, Texas, Missouri and Oklahoma.

The storms in Texas began on March 31 and brought heavy rain and strong winds that caused road closures and property damage. In some areas, there was large hail that caused damage and there were reports of injuries due to falling debris and vehicle accidents caused by severe weather conditions.

The weather system moved to East Texas by April 4, knocking down trees, causing damage to a Baptist encampment in Daingerfield. Emergency responders reported injuries from the storm though none were life-threatening.

A high-end EF1 tornado tracked from west-northwest of Hawkins to northwest of Gilmer, spanning approximately 20.63

miles with a maximum width of 1,420 yards. The tornado caused significant tree damage, damaged homes, and notably impacted a water bottling plant where a semi-truck driver was injured.

Another less powerful tornado traveled northwest of Van to east of Grand Saline, covering nine miles. It damaged homes, including partial wall loss and roof damage, and snapped several trees.

After ravaging these states, the storms strengthened and moved eastward, causing more damage and deadly flooding with tornado outbreaks across Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia.

In Kentucky, people faced some of the most severe flooding, with swollen rivers reaching near-record levels. In the state capital of Frankfort, neighborhoods were submerged, and the historic Buffalo Trace Distillery was forced to close temporarily due to inundation. More than 500 state roads were shut down and thousands of residents faced water outages or were placed under boil-water advisories. Emergency crews conducted numerous evacuations and boat rescues.

In Frankfort on April 4, nine-year-old Gabriel Andrews died after being swept away by floodwaters while walking to his school bus stop. After the boy's body was found, parents demanded to know why schools were open in Franklin County for in-person learning to begin with.

A parent told WDKY, "I think Franklin County should have called schools off. They did call certain bus routes out. But I mean, at 6 a.m. this morning, we had lightning and thunder. You're taking the chance on, you know, putting these kids on a bus through this weather, not knowing, you know, if they're going to run into flooded waters."

In Tennessee, flash flooding and strong winds caused widespread damage, prompting officials to urge residents to remain indoors and avoid affected areas. The state reported at least 10 deaths due to the severe weather conditions.

Specific details regarding the identities and circumstances of all the victims have not been disclosed. Available reports confirmed fatalities from the storms in Selmer, McNairy County, where an EF3 tornado—with winds of 136 to 165 miles

per hour—struck the town causing significant destruction.

In Georgia, the storms caused widespread damage, including downed trees and power outages in several areas. Heavy rainfall led to flash flooding in various regions, rendering roads impassable and prompting officials to advise residents to remain indoors.

Tragic incidents included the deaths of a father and son on April 6, when Matthew Terrell Collins Sr., 58, and Matthew Terrell Collins Jr., 29, were fatally injured when a tree fell on their golf cart at Bull Creek Golf Course in Midland during the storm. The two had sought shelter under a tree as severe weather struck the area.

In Mississippi, severe storms resulted in multiple fatalities and significant property damage. Residents faced power outages and emergency services conducted numerous rescues in flooded areas. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) reported one fatality in Jasper County during the severe weather between April 2 and April 3. Specific details about the deceased and the circumstances were not yet available.

Several towns, including Hardy and West Memphis in Arkansas, suffered structural damage and required mass rescues due to the flooding. The extreme weather led to road closures and displacement of residents. Thousands remained without power on Monday morning.

The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM) reported 13 injuries statewide since Wednesday. A five-year-old in Little Rock died on Saturday when a tree fell on his family's home during the storm.

Another death was reported by ADEM after the Sherwood Fire Department found an adult male victim in a submerged vehicle near the area of Rixie Road.

Missouri also reported fatalities, including a firefighter who died during a rescue mission. Floodwaters caused significant disruptions, leading to evacuations and damage to infrastructure.

The National Weather Service has linked the extreme weather to a combination of warm temperatures, unstable atmospheric conditions, and high moisture levels from the Gulf of Mexico. Rainfall totals reached historic highs in some regions, with certain areas receiving up to 16 inches of rain.

The severity and frequency of such storms have been increasing, with studies indicating a rise in rainfall intensity due to climate change. While these deadly weather conditions are intensifying as a byproduct of capitalist induced global warming, President Donald Trump has cut the funding and staff of the federal departments responsible for studying weather trends and providing forecasts.

A report by Associated Press explained:

After Trump administration job cuts, nearly half of National Weather Service forecast offices have 20%

vacancy rates—twice that of just a decade ago—as severe weather chugs across the nation's heartland, according to data obtained by The Associated Press.

Detailed vacancy data for all 122 weather field offices show eight offices are missing more than 35% of their staff—including those in Arkansas where tornadoes and torrential rain hit this week—according to statistics crowd-sourced by more than a dozen National Weather Service employees. Experts said vacancy rates of 20% or higher amount to critical understaffing, and 55 of the 122 sites reach that level.

The weather offices issue routine daily forecasts, but also urgent up-to-the-minute warnings during dangerous storm outbreaks such as the tornadoes that killed seven people this week and “catastrophic” flooding that's continuing through the weekend. The weather service this week has logged at least 75 tornado and 1,277 severe weather preliminary reports.

A similar report was published by the *Guardian* about the impact of the job cuts on the work of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA):

A sense of chaos has gripped the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), one of the world's premier research agencies, with key staff hastily fired and then rehired, cuts to vital weather forecasting operations and even a new, unsecured server that led to staff being deluged by obscene spam emails.

NOAA is currently being upended by Donald Trump's desire to slash the federal government workforce, with more than 1,000 people already fired or resigning from the agency and 1,000 more staffers are expected to be removed as the purge continues. In total, this represents around 20% of the NOAA's workforce.

Along with leading climate and marine research, NOAA also houses the National Weather Service, which provides bedrock weather forecasts to private providers and the public. There are concerns that the Trump administration's cuts, spearheaded by Elon Musk's so-called “department of government efficiency” (Doge), could imperil public safety by hindering timely warnings of tornadoes and hurricanes.



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