

UPDATE: 17 Dead After Storm Sinks Missouri Duck Boat

Divers on Friday pulled the last four bodies from the wreckage of a “duck boat” that sank in a storm in a Missouri lake, killing 17 people in one of the deadliest U.S. tourist incidents in years.

The World War Two-style amphibious vehicle was filled with 31 passengers including children when a microburst storm hit Table Rock Lake outside the tourist city of Branson, Missouri, on Thursday. A video of the incident showed it battered by waves.

Wendy Doucey, an office manager at the Stone County sheriff’s office, said divers had recovered the four bodies from the sunken duck boat. The vehicle was 80 feet (24 m) under water.

“It’s important that we find out for sure what events did occur,” Missouri Governor Michael Parson said at a Friday morning news conference. “Today it’s just still early.”

The incident began around 7 p.m. (0000 GMT) on Thursday after thunderstorms rolled through the area, when two duck boats were out on the lake, officials said. Both headed back to shore but only one made it.

“From what I understand there was life jackets in the duck,” Stone County Sheriff Doug Rader told the press conference. He declined to answer questions about whether passengers on the duck had been wearing them.

The National Transportation Safety Board and U.S. Coast Guard are investigating, officials said. Rader noted that the boat’s captain survived the sinking but the driver did not.

Officials did not comment on the identities or ages of the

other people who drowned.

'NEVER SEEN IT LIKE THIS'

Rick Kettles, the owner of the Lakeside Resort General Store and Restaurant, said he had never before seen conditions on Table Rock Lake like those that resulted from Thursday's storm.

"I am 54 and I started coming here when I was 6 or 7 years old. I have been on my lake most of my life and I have never seen it like this," Kettles said. "I am trying to figure out why the boats were out there. I don't get it, having a captain's license myself."

A microburst is a severe, localized wind gust, blasting down from a thunderstorm, typically covering an area less than 2.5 miles (4 km) in diameter and lasting less than five minutes.

The company that owned the duck boat, Ripley Entertainment, said it was working with families of the victims.

"Our number one priority is the families and our employees that were affected by this tragic accident," spokeswoman Suzanne Smagala-Potts said on Thursday.

Table Rock Lake is a 67-square-mile (174 sq km) reservoir containing water impounded by the Table Rock Dam on the White River.

Duck vehicles, modeled on the landing craft used in the D-Day invasion and used on sightseeing tours around the world, have been involved in a number of fatal accidents on land and water in the past two decades.

Thirteen people died in 1999 when the duck boat they were riding near Hot Springs, Arkansas, sank suddenly.

The company that builds ducks, Ride the Ducks International LLC, agreed in 2016 to pay a \$1 million fine after one of the

vehicles, which operate on land as well as water, collided with a bus in Seattle, killing five international students.

The company admitted to failing to comply with U.S. vehicle manufacturing rules.

Two tourists died in Philadelphia in 2010 when the duck boat they were riding in was struck by a tugboat in the Delaware River.

Branson, in southwestern Missouri, is a family-friendly tourist destination whose attractions include “Dolly Parton’s Stampede” dinner theater, the Amazing Acrobats of Shanghai and a Titanic museum with a model of the sunken vessel’s front half.

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