

Dozens Feared Dead as Tornadoes Rip Through Multiple Midwestern States

Tornadoes and severe weather caused catastrophic damage across multiple states late Friday, killing at least six people overnight as a storm system tore through a candle factory in Kentucky, an Amazon facility in Illinois and a nursing home in Arkansas. The Kentucky governor said he feared dozens more could be dead.

Gov. Andy Beshear said about 110 people were in the factory in Mayfield, Kentucky, when the tornado hit.

"We believe our death toll from this event will exceed 50 Kentuckians and probably end up 70 to 100," he said at a news conference Saturday. "It's very hard, really tough, and we're praying for each and every one of those families."

Kyana Parsons-Perez, a factory employee, was trapped under five feet (about 1.5 meters) of debris for at least two hours until rescuers managed to free her.

In an interview with *Today*, she said it was the "absolutely the most terrifying" event she had ever experienced. "I did not think I was going to make it at all."

Just before the tornado struck, the building's lights flickered. She felt a gust of wind, her ears started "popping" and then, "Boom. Everything came down on us." People started screaming, and she heard Hispanic workers praying in Spanish.

Among those who helped rescue the trapped workers were inmates from the nearby Graves County Jail, she said.

"They could have used that moment to try to run away or anything, but they did not. They were there, helping us," she

said.

At least one person died at an Amazon facility in Edwardsville, Illinois, Police Chief Mike Fillback told reporters Saturday morning. The roof of the building was ripped off, and a wall about the length of a football field collapsed.

Two people at the facility were taken by helicopter to hospitals in St. Louis, Fillback said. The chief said he did not know how serious their injuries were. Edwardsville is about 25 miles (40 km) east of St. Louis.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the damage was caused by straight-line storms or a tornado, but the National Weather Service office near St. Louis reported "radar-confirmed tornadoes" in the Edwardsville area around the time of the collapse.

About 30 people who were in the building were taken by bus to the police station in nearby Pontoon Beach for evaluation.

Early Saturday, rescue crews were still sorting through the rubble. Fillback said the process could take several more hours. Cranes and backhoes were brought in to help move debris.

The *Belleville News-Democrat* reported that the Amazon fulfillment center in Edwardsville opened with two warehouses in 2016, with 1.5 million square feet (about 139,000 square meters) of space. The warehouses are used to store items until they are shipped to mail-order customers.

"The safety and well-being of our employees and partners is our top priority right now," Amazon spokesperson Richard Rocha said in a written statement Friday night. "We're assessing the situation and will share additional information when it's available."

Workers at a National Weather Service office had to take shelter as a tornado passed near their office in Weldon Spring, Missouri, about 30 miles (48 km) west of St. Louis. One person died and two others were injured in building collapses near the towns of Defiance and New Melle, both just a few miles from the weather service office.

A tornado struck the Monette Manor nursing home in Arkansas on Friday night, killing one person and trapping 20 people inside as the building collapsed, Craighead County Judge Marvin Day told The Associated Press.

Five people had serious injuries, and a few others had minor ones, he said. The nursing home has 86 beds.

Three storm-related deaths were confirmed in Tennessee, said Dean Flener, spokesman for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. Two of the deaths occurred in Lake County, and the third was in Obion County—both in the northwestern corner of the state.

In Kentucky, several buildings collapsed during the severe weather that struck Mayfield, said Sarah Burgess, a trooper with the Kentucky State Police.

“The entire building is essentially leveled,” she said.

Farther east in Bowling Green, Western Kentucky University said on Twitter that emergency crews were assessing significant storm damage and that no injuries were immediately reported. However, the school called off commencement ceremonies that were planned for Saturday because the campus was without power.

“It’s obvious we had major wind damage,” said Ronnie Ward, a Bowling Green police spokesman, in a telephone interview.

Rescue efforts in Bowling Green and elsewhere were hampered by debris strewn across roads. Ward said numerous apartment

complexes in Bowling Green had major structural damage, and some factories had collapsed during the storms.

“Right now we’re focusing on the citizens, trying to get to everybody that needs us,” Ward said. {eoa}

Jablon reported from Los Angeles; Salter reported from O’Fallon, Missouri. Associated Press journalists Bruce Schreiner in Frankfort, Kentucky, John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia, and Jeff McMurray in Chicago contributed to this report.

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