

Easter Storms Sweep South, Killing at Least 20 People

Severe weather has swept across the South, killing at least 20 people and damaging hundreds of homes from Louisiana into the Appalachian Mountains. Many people spent part of the night early Monday sheltering in basements, closets and bathroom tubs as sirens wailed to warn of possible tornadoes.

Eleven people were killed in Mississippi, and six more died in northwest Georgia. Three other bodies were pulled from damaged homes in Arkansas and South Carolina.

The storms blew onward through the night, causing flooding and mudslides in mountainous areas, and knocking out electricity for about 750,000 customers in a 10-state swath ranging from Texas to Georgia up to West Virginia, according to .

In Alabama, where Gov. Kay Ivey suspended social distancing rules related to the coronavirus pandemic because of the weather threat, people wearing protective masks huddled closely together in a storm shelter.

A suspected twister lifted a house, mostly intact, and deposited it in the middle of a road in central Georgia. In Louisiana, winds ripped apart a metal airplane hangar.

The National Weather Service tallied hundreds of reports of trees down across the region, including many that punctured roofs and downed power lines. Meteorologists warned the mid-Atlantic states to prepare for potential tornadoes, wind and hail on Monday.

In Georgia, Murray County Fire Chief Dewayne Bain told WAGA-TV that two mobile home parks were severely damaged, with five people killed and five others hospitalized after a narrow line of storms left a 5-mile long path of destruction. Another

person was killed when a tree fell on a home in Cartersville, the station reported.

Mississippi's death toll rose to 11 early Monday, the state's emergency management agency tweeted, promising details later in the morning.

In Arkansas, one person was killed when a tree fell on a home in White Hall, about 35 miles southeast of Little Rock, the Jefferson County Department of Emergency Management said. In South Carolina, a person was found dead in a collapsed building near Seneca as the apparent tornado struck the city around 3:30 a.m. Monday, Oconee County Emergency Management Director Scott Krein said.

Several apparent tornadoes spun up in South Carolina, where dozens of homes appeared damaged in a line from Seneca to Clemson. Emergency officials were working to open shelters in the North Carolina mountains, where up to 5 inches (13 centimeters) of rain fell in a few hours.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, at least 150 homes and commercial buildings were damaged and more than a dozen people treated, but none of their injuries appeared to be life-threatening, Chattanooga Fire Chief Phil Hyman said Monday morning.

"It's widespread damage that happened extremely fast," he said. "I advise people to stay in their homes at this point. As far as safety is concerned, we still have active power lines that are down."

The deaths in Mississippi included a married couple—Lawrence County sheriff's deputy, Robert Ainsworth, and a Walthall County Justice Court deputy clerk, Paula We, a Facebook post from the county sheriff's office said.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves declared a state of emergency Sunday night after he said several tornadoes had struck the state.

“This is not how anyone wants to celebrate Easter,” Reeves said on Twitter. “As we reflect on the death and resurrection on this Easter Sunday, we have faith that we will all rise together.”

Strong winds late Sunday toppled power lines and blew trees onto several houses in Clarksdale, Mississippi, trapping some people inside, Mayor Chuck Espy said.

“I know these are some tough times and I’m just asking everyone to stay prayed up,” Espy said.

There were no immediate reports of serious injuries in Louisiana, even though the storm damaged between 200 and 300 homes in and around the city of Monroe, Mayor Jamie Mayo, told KNOE-TV. Flights were canceled at Monroe Regional Airport, where airport director Ron Phillips told the News-Star the storm caused up to \$30 million in damage to planes inside a hangar.

In Alabama, lightning struck the Shoals Creek Baptist Church in Priceville, damaging the roof and steeple, Morgan County Emergency Management Agency Eddie Hicks told . {eo}

The Associated Press