

At Least 11 Die From Texas Tornadoes, 13 In Midwest Flooding

BY DAVID WARREN
Associated Press

GARLAND, Texas — At least 11 people died and dozens were injured in strong tornadoes that swept through the Dallas area and caused substantial damage this weekend, while 13 people died in flooding in the Midwest.

It was the latest of a succession of powerful weather events across the country, from heavy snow in New Mexico, west Texas and the Oklahoma Panhandle to flooding in parts of the Plains and Midwest. Days of tumultuous weather have led to 43 deaths overall — those in Texas, plus five in Illinois, eight in Missouri and 19 in the Southeast.

The full extent of damage from Saturday's storms along a nearly 40-mile stretch near Dallas came into clear focus. Local officials estimated as many as 1,450 homes were damaged or destroyed. Vehicles were mangled, power lines fell and trees were toppled. Heavy rain, wind and falling temperatures hampered cleanup efforts Sunday afternoon.

"This is a huge impact on our community and we're all suffering," Garland Police Lt. Pedro Barineau said of the suburb about 20 miles northeast of Dallas, where eight people died, 15 were injured and about 600 structures, mostly single-family homes, were damaged.

The weather service said an EF-4 tornado, which is the second-most powerful with winds up to more than 200 mph, hit the community at about 6:45 p.m. Saturday. It was near the intersection of Interstate 30 and George Bush Turnpike, which is a major route in the region. At least three people who died were found in vehicles, said Barineau, who also noted that some cars appeared to be thrown from the interstate, though it wasn't known whether that was how the people found in the vehicles died.

Natalie Guzman, 33, took photos of her family's home in a Garland neighborhood. The garage wall had collapsed and the roof fell in. The only part of the house that appeared to be spared was the master bathroom, where her brother-in-law took shelter Saturday night. He was the only one at home and told her he had just enough time to get himself and



NATHAN HUNSINGER/DALLAS MORNING NEWS/TNS
A Jeep Liberty sits destroyed on Shipman Street in Rowlett, Texas, Sunday, after a tornado hit the area the night before.

his dogs into the bathroom.

"It was worse than I thought," Guzman said, comparing the scene to the photos he had sent Saturday.

The destruction in Garland was so overwhelming that Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins declared the city a disaster within mere minutes of seeing the toll firsthand.

"I don't declare local disasters lightly," Jenkins said. "But I looked at the scene for 10 minutes, spoke to the incident commander and then called the lawyers to bring the paperwork."

In the nearby town of Rowlett, City Manager Brian Funderburk said Sunday morning that 23 people were injured, but that there were no deaths and no reports of missing people. The weather service said damage indicated it was likely an EF-3 tornado, which has winds up to 165 mph.

Jenkins said in a statement Sunday night that as many as 600 homes were damaged in Rowlett.

Dale Vermurlen lived in a Rowlett neighborhood that sustained heavy damage. His house only had minor damage, but homes next to that were flattened.

"I grabbed both dogs by the collars and held on to the toilet. I said, 'OK, this could be it, boys.'"

Homes in the neighborhood that had been searched by emergency responders

were marked with a black "X." In some instances, it looked like homes had been picked up and set back down in a big pile. State troopers blocked off roads, utility crews restored power and people walked around, hushed and dazed.

Three other people died in Collin County, about 45 miles northeast of Dallas, according to sheriff's deputy Chris Havey, although the circumstances were not immediately clear.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott made disaster declarations Sunday for four counties — Dallas, Collin, Rockwall and Ellis — and warned that the number of victims could rise.

On the other side of the state, the Department of Public Safety in Amarillo strongly discouraged travel throughout the entire Texas Panhandle — a 26-county area covering nearly 26,000 square miles — because blowing and drifting snow had made the roads impassable. Interstate 40, the main east-west highway across the Panhandle, was almost completely shut down. DPS said only a small section of the highway in Amarillo remained open.

Meanwhile, Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin declared a state of emergency as there were blizzard conditions and an ice storm warning out west and flood warnings in the east, where one community had received 9 inches of rain. The state Department of Emergency Management said eight

storm-related injuries were reported. About 60,000 homes and businesses were without power.

In neighboring Arkansas, officials said it appeared that a tornado touched down in Bearden, tearing roofs off buildings and uprooting trees. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Farther north, rain caused dangerous driving conditions and flooding in Missouri, where Gov. Jay Nixon also declared a state of emergency, and Illinois.

Six people died overnight when two separate vehicles drove into flooded roadways in south-central Missouri, Pulaski County Sheriff Ronald Long said. Greene County authorities said two fatalities there were associated with the flooding.

In southern Illinois, authorities said three adults and two children drowned Saturday evening when the vehicle they were riding in was swept away and sank in a rain-swollen creek.

The death toll in the Southeast linked to severe weather rose to 19 on Sunday when Alabama authorities found the body of a 22-year-old man whose vehicle was swept away while attempting to cross a bridge; a 5-year-old's body was recovered for that incident Saturday. Ten people have died in Mississippi, and six died in Tennessee. One person was killed in Arkansas.

IS Puts Up Heavy Fight To Slow Iraqis

BAGHDAD (AP) — Islamic State fighters are putting up a tough fight in the militant-held city of Ramadi, slowing down the advance of Iraqi forces, a senior Iraqi commander said Sunday.

Iraq launched the long-awaited operation to retake the Anbar provincial capital, which was captured by IS militants in May, but after an initial push across the Euphrates River, the progress stalled.

Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi, head of the Anbar military operations, told The Associated Press that the advance was hampered by suicide bombers, snipers and booby traps.

Iraqi troops will "need days" to get to the city's central government complex, said al-Mahlawi, adding that the troops were about one kilometer (half mile) from the complex on Sunday.

Al-Mahlawi said he could neither confirm nor deny media reports that IS fighters had pulled out of the government complex by nightfall Sunday. But he cited residents in the area as telling his troops that the IS militants had withdrawn from the neighborhood of Albu Alwan, adjacent to the complex.

'Force Awakens' Is Fastest To \$1 Billion

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" has reached \$1 billion at the box office, achieving the milestone with record-setting hyper speed.

The Walt Disney Co. said "The Force Awakens" crossed the billion-dollar mark Sunday, accomplishing the feat in just 12 days. The previous movie to reach \$1 billion the fastest was Universal's "Jurassic World," which did it in 13 days in June. "Jurassic World" also had the benefit of record grosses in China. "The Force Awakens" doesn't open in the world's second-largest movie market until Jan. 9.

J.J. Abrams' installment of "Star Wars" also posted the biggest Christmas Day box office in history with \$49.3 million and the best second-weekend earnings with \$153.5 million.

"The Force Awakens" has been setting records since its debut Dec. 17. It brought in a galactic \$238 million in North America over its opening weekend, besting previous record-setter "Jurassic World," and set international opening-weekend records in Australia, New Zealand and throughout Europe. It scored the biggest worldwide debut with \$529 million. It also topped \$100 million in IMAX screenings in 10 days, another global record.

"You almost have to rewrite all the record books for this movie," box office analyst Paul Dergarabedian of Rentrak said. "It's absolutely mind-blowing that 'Star Wars' could get to a billion dollars in 12 days and it hasn't even opened in China, the second biggest movie market in the world."

Activists Predict Abortion As Hot Issue

NEW YORK (AP) — With a deeper-than-ever split between Republicans and Democrats over abortion, activists on both sides of the debate foresee a 2016 presidential campaign in which the nominees tackle the volatile topic more aggressively than in past elections.

Friction over the issue also is likely to surface in key Senate races. And the opposing camps will be further energized by Republican-led congressional investigations of Planned Parenthood and by Supreme Court consideration of tough anti-abortion laws in Texas.

"It's an amazing convergence of events," said Charmaine Yost, CEO of the anti-abortion group Americans United for Life. "We haven't seen a moment like this for 40 years."

In the presidential race, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton is a longtime defender of abortion rights and has voiced strong support for Planned Parenthood — a major provider of abortions, health screenings and contraceptives — as it is assailed by anti-abortion activists and Republican officeholders.

In contrast, nearly all of the GOP candidates favor overturning the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide. Some of the top contenders — including Sens. Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio — disapprove of abortions even in cases of rape and incest.

Israeli Liberals Cry Foul Over Funding Bill

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Cabinet ministers gave preliminary approval Sunday to a bill that imposes new disclosure requirements on nonprofit groups that receive foreign funding — drawing accusations the government was trying to crack down on government critics, rattling relations with Europe and deepening an increasingly toxic divide between liberal and hawkish Israelis.

Critics said the regulations are meant to stifle dovish organizations critical of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government policies toward the Palestinians, since such nonprofits tend to rely heavily on donations from European countries.

In contrast, pro-government and nationalist nonprofit groups tend to rely on wealthy private donors, who are exempt from the measures under the bill. The legislature is expected to approve the bill as early as this week.

Opposition leader Isaac Herzog quickly blasted the bill as a "muzzling law" that would bring about "thought police."

The bill, proposed by Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and approved by a committee of ministers, also dealt a new setback to already strained relations with the European Union, which funds a variety of nonprofit groups. Israeli leaders have been outraged over the EU's recent decision to require labels on imported products made in West Bank settlements.

Relatives Of 2 Killed By Chicago Police Question Shootings

BY MICHAEL TARM
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Grieving relatives and friends of two people shot and killed by Chicago police said Sunday the slayings raised concerns about why officers "shoot first and ask questions later," saying the city failed residents even as a federal civil rights investigation has begun scrutinizing police practices.

Quintonio LeGrier, 19, was killed early Saturday by police responding to a domestic disturbance at an apartment on the city's West Side, along with downstairs neighbor Bettie Jones, 55. Police said Jones was hit accidentally by the gunfire.

Both were black. The shootings came amid scrutiny of police after a series of deaths of African-Americans at the hands of officers across the country gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement.

LeGrier's mother, Janet Cooksey, during a vigil Sunday placed candles on the porch of the two-story home, where Jones lived in a ground-floor apartment and LeGrier's father in an upstairs unit. On either side of the door, Post-It notes indicated where two bullets hit siding on the house.

"I used to watch the news daily and I would grieve for other mothers, other family members, and now today I'm grieving myself," Cooksey said at a news conference outside the residence earlier Sunday. She wore a black shirt with Mayor Rahm Emanuel's image on it and the phrase "Rahm Failed Us."

Others who spoke said police should have used stun guns or other nonlethal methods if they felt they needed to subdue LeGrier, a college student home for holiday break.

"Why do (police) have to shoot first and ask questions later?" Jacqueline Walker, a

friend of Jones, asked. "It's ridiculous."

Some who showed up to support the families of Jones and LeGrier questioned how such shootings could occur while federal investigators are focusing on the Chicago Police Department, including a look at whether there are patterns of racial disparity in the use of force.

"Something is seriously wrong," said the Rev. Marshall E. Hatch, who attended the vigil. "How in the middle of all this scrutiny, (can you) have a trigger-happy policeman?"

The Police Department said in a statement Saturday that officers who responded to a 911 call "were confronted by a combative subject resulting in the discharging of the officer's weapon."

"The 55-year-old female victim was accidentally struck and tragically killed," according to the statement, which extended "deepest condo-

lences to the victim's family and friends."

Jones, a mother of five known for working with community groups committed to reducing violence, had hosted family on Christmas Day, friends and relatives said.

Family spokesman Eric Russell said Jones' many grandchildren had hoped to thank her for their Christmas gifts over the weekend. "They were denied that opportunity," he said.

Jones and LeGrier were pronounced dead at hospitals, according to the Cook County medical examiner's office.

Police did not disclose the race of the officer or officers, saying only that those involved will be placed on administrative duties. It isn't clear how many officers responded, how many used their firearms and how many times LeGrier and Jones were struck.

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