

Search

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because there were no street signs left. Some rescuers used smartphones or GPS devices to guide them through areas with no recognizable landmarks.

The death toll was revised downward from 51 after the state medical examiner said some victims may have been counted twice in the confusion. More than 200 people were treated at area hospitals.

By Tuesday afternoon, every damaged home had been searched at least once, Bird said. His goal was to conduct three searches of each building just to be certain there were no more bodies or survivors.

The fire chief was hopeful that could be completed before nightfall, but the work was being hampered by heavy rain. Crews also continued a brick-by-brick search of the rubble of a school that was blown apart with many children inside.

No additional survivors or bodies have been found since Monday night, Bird said.

Survivors emerged with harrowing accounts of the storm's wrath, which many endured as they shielded loved ones.

Chelsie McCumber grabbed her 2-year-old son, Ethan, wrapped him in jackets and covered him with a mattress before they squeezed into a coat closet of their house. McCumber sang to her child when he complained it was getting hot inside the small space.

"I told him we're going to play tent in the closet," she said, beginning to cry.

"I just felt air so I knew the roof was gone," she said Tuesday, standing under the sky where her roof should have been. The home was littered with wet gray insulation and all of their belongings.

"Time just kind of stood still" in the closet, she recalled. "I was kind of holding my breath thinking this isn't the worst of it. I didn't think that was it. I kept waiting for it to get worse."

"When I got out, it was worse than I thought," she said.

Gov. Mary Fallin lamented the loss of life, especially the children who were killed, but she celebrated the town's resilience.

"We will rebuild, and we will regain our strength," Fallin said.

In describing the bird's-eye view of the damage, the governor said many houses were "taken away," leaving "just sticks and bricks, basically. It's hard to tell if there was a structure there or not."

From the air, large stretches of town could be seen where every home had been cut to pieces. Some homes were sucked off their concrete slabs. A pond was filled with piles of wood and an overturned trailer.

Also visible were large patches of red earth where the tornado scoured the land down to the soil. Some tree trunks were still standing, but the winds ripped away their leaves, limbs and bark.

In revising its estimate of the storm's power, the National Weather Service said the tornado had winds of at least 200 mph and was on the ground for 40 minutes.

The agency upgraded the tornado from an EF4 on the enhanced Fujita scale based on reports from a damage-assessment team, said spokeswoman Keli Pirtle. Monday's twister was at least a half-mile wide. It was the nation's first EF5 tornado of 2013.

Other search-and-rescue teams concentrated on Plaza Towers Elementary, where the storm ripped off the roof, knocked down walls and destroyed the playground as students and teachers huddled in hallways and bathrooms.

Seven of the nine dead children were killed at the school, but several students were pulled alive from under a collapsed wall and other heaps of mangled debris. Rescue workers passed the survivors down a human chain of parents and neighborhood volunteers. Parents carried children in their arms to a triage center in the parking lot. Some students looked dazed, others terrified.

Neither Plaza Towers nor another school in Oklahoma City that was not as severely damaged had reinforced storm shelters, or safe rooms, said Albert Ashwood is director of the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management.

More than 100 schools across the state do have safe rooms, he said, explaining that it's up to each jurisdiction to set spending priorities.

Ashwood said a shelter would not necessarily have saved more lives at Plaza Towers.

"When you talk about any kind of safety measures ... it's a mitigating measure, it's not an absolute," he told reporters. "There's not a guarantee that everyone will be totally safe."

211

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Tuesday to support using the 211 service.

Wenande said the city would work with Scherschligt on how to direct information during emergencies. She added that it provides an efficient way to obtain information about services for citizens.

"It's really a wonderful way for our citizens to navigate the very complex and ever-growing health and human services in our area," Hanson added. "By making these services easier to access, we believe that 211 encourages prevention and self-sufficiency for our citizens so they can be more productive. We believe that is important."

She said 211 tracks the needs of the community based on the calls it receives and issues an annual report to the county that can be used as a tool to better respond to community needs.

A couple of commissioners expressed concerns about the costs of 211.

"What you're telling us is, this sum of money is it? We're not going to be asked to furnish personnel, office space or anything like that down the road?" asked Commissioner Allen Sinclair, who said past experience has shown that programs often accumulate additional costs.

Scherchligt said that would not be the case with 211.

Commissioner Garry Moore was worried that Yankton County is funding too much of the service compared to Bon Homme and Hutchinson counties.

"Most of the support services that go along with this come out of this county," he said. "We're the ones who are going to be providing the support for a lot of the

basic human needs ... I'm not sure we should pay a larger portion. We should probably be looking at 30-40 cents and maybe the others should be paying 70 cents per citizen."

United Way spearheaded an effort to get 211 in Yankton County in 2005, but it could not obtain sufficient funding.

The estimated set-up cost of the service then was \$3,750, while it was expected to cost approximately \$11,500 annually to keep afloat.

At that time, neither the Yankton County Commission nor the Yankton City Commission were willing to provide an initial \$2,000 contribution to cover the set-up costs and splitting the annual cost with United Way.

United Way does help fund the service in Sioux Falls, and Sinclair asked why that wasn't being offered in Yankton County.

"We are fully in support of doing so, if needed," Hanson said. "But our funding is not a very consistent funding source. In the last five years, we have not met our (fundraising) goal. We're struggling to continue to provide services to our current agencies."

No action was taken on the agenda item.

The commissioners asked that Scherschligt inquire whether 211 would agree to a multi-year contract to lock in the price and gather some other price-related information for consideration at the County Commission's June 4 meeting.

In other business Tuesday, the commission:

- discussed whether or not to bring Yankton Search and Rescue under the umbrella of the Yankton County Emergency Management Office. It was once under the auspices of the department until its members thought the group would be able to gain more access to grants and other funding sources by breaking away from the county. No action was taken Tuesday, but if the group did re-join the emergency management office, it would become Yankton County Search and Rescue;
- heard information about the Yankton County Government Center's problematic phone system. Staff said new Cisco phones had been installed by Knology a couple months ago and problems with sound quality and usability

ensued. A couple department heads said they would not spend their own money on the phones and noted that, on top of the problems, their monthly phone bills are excessive. Lori Mackey, the director of equalization, said she could get cell phones for her entire staff for less expense than the landline service. Knology representatives said they will work to resolve the problems with the phone system;

- heard a complaint from Roger and Carolyn Holtzmann about a neighbor's dogs. They live along Timberland Drive and said the dogs come on their property and rip the siding off their house. After notifying the neighbor of the problem, the couple said the problem persisted. Poison was put out, and it killed one of the dogs. After that, the Holtzmanns said they found a dead goose stuffed in their mailbox. Currently, the county's nuisance ordinance does not have language that applies to domesticated animals ruining property, and the commission said it will pursue amending the ordinance so something can be done about the situation. In the meantime, Yankton County Planning

and Zoning Administrator Pat Garrity said he will send a letter to the neighbor asking that the dogs be kept under control and that remedies would be sought at the county level if the animal incursions don't stop;

- heard information presented by Moore about the possibility of combining county offices, specifically the auditor and treasurer's offices. It has been done in other counties. The commission agreed it couldn't hurt to look into the possibility and told Moore to gather more information for consideration at a future meeting;
- opted to stay with a Wellmark health insurance plan; and
- approved an ambulance rate increase.

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