

Easter storms sweep South, killing at least 20 people

April 13 2020, by Emily Wagster Pettus



A home had its roof torn off after a tornado ripped through Monroe, La. just before noon on Sunday, April 12, 2020 causing damage to a neighborhood and the regional airport. (Nicolas Galindo/The News-Star via AP)

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. Two 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 nearly 1.3 million customers in a path from Texas to Maine, according to poweroutages.us.

Striking first on Easter Sunday across a landscape largely emptied by coronavirus stay-at-home orders, the storm front forced some uncomfortable decisions. In Alabama, Gov. Kay Ivey suspended social distancing rules, and some people wearing protective masks huddled closely together in storm shelters.

Andrew Phillips crowded into a closet-sized "safe room" with his wife and two sons after watching an online Easter service because the pandemic forced their church to halt regular worship. Then, a twister struck, shredding their house, meat-processing business and vehicles in rural Moss, Mississippi. The room, built of sturdy cinder blocks, was the only thing on their property left standing.



In this image made from video provided by WLBT-TV strong storms pound parts of the Deep South, including this house and shed in Yazoo County, Miss., Sunday, April 12, 2020. Winds damaged buildings and toppled trees throughout Louisiana and Mississippi as they advance to Tennessee and Alabama. (Mike Evans/WLBT-TV, via AP)

"I'm just going to let the insurance handle it and trust in the good Lord," said Phillips.

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. The storms knocked down trees across Pennsylvania, and an apparently strong tornado moved

through southern South Carolina, leaving chaos in its wake.

"Everything is up in the air. Power lines are down, trees are all over the place. It's hard to get from one place to the other because the roads are blocked," Hampton County Sheriff T.C. Smalls said.

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.



Neighbors and family help to clean a damaged home in Monroe, La. after a tornado ripped through the town just before noon on Sunday, April 12, 2020. (Nicolas Galindo/The News-Star via AP)

Deaths were tallied in small numbers here and there, considering the storm front's vast reach and intensity.

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

In northwest Georgia, a narrow path of destruction five miles long hit two mobile home parks, killing five people and injuring five more, Murray County Fire Chief Dewayne Bain told WAGA-TV. Another person was killed when a tree fell on a home in Cartersville, the station reported.

In Arkansas, one person was killed when a tree fell on a home in White Hall, 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 an apparent tornado struck, Oconee County Emergency Management Director Scott Krein said. And in North Carolina, a person was killed by a falling tree in Davidson County, northeast of Charlotte, as high winds were blowing through, Sheriff's Capt. Mike Burns said.



Rolanda Robinson calls family and friends from her brother's damaged home in Monroe, La. after a tornado ripped through the town on Sunday, April 12, 2020. (Nicolas Galindo/The News-Star via AP)

Apparent tornadoes damaged dozens of homes in a line from Seneca to Clemson. Emergency officials also were working to open shelters in the North Carolina mountains after heavy rainfall there.

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.

"It's widespread damage that happened extremely fast," Hyman 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 Reid Ainsworth, authorities said.



Jacob Aliff tries to salvage items from his home after severe weather hit, knocking down a tree on the home in Lakeview Mobile Estates south of Raleigh, N.C., Monday morning, April 13, 2020. Jacob's father, Michael Aliff, who has owned the trailer for 35 years, said he was sitting in his chair in the living room around 7:50 a.m when, without warning, "all hell broke loose." He was uninjured. (Ethan Hyman/The News & Observer via AP)



Neighbors inspect a house for occupants in Monroe, La. after an Easter tornado ripped through the town just before noon on Sunday, April 12, 2020. (Nicolas Galindo/The News-Star via AP)



Emma Pritchett, 78, hold up a broken glass from her kitchen sink the day after a tornado hit on Monday, April 13, 2020, in Chatsworth, Ga. Severe weather has swept across the South, killing a multiple 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. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)



Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo, talks to a displaced resident after severe storms damaged homes in Monroe, La., Sunday, April 12, 2020. (Greg Hilburn/Monroe News Star via AP)



A destroyed hangar and damaged planes are seen at Monroe Regional Airport in Monroe, La., Sunday, April 12, 2020. (Monroe News Star/Greg Hilburn via AP)



A woman walks near a damaged mobile home after a tornado hit, Monday, April 13, 2020, in Chatsworth, Ga. Severe weather has swept across the South, killing a multiple 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. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)



A damaged trailer is seen after a tornado hit on Monday, April 13, 2020, in Chatsworth, Ga. Severe weather has swept across the South, killing a multiple 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. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)

"Robert left this world a hero, as he shielded Mrs. Paula during the tornado," said a Facebook message by the sheriff's office.

"This is not how anyone wants to celebrate Easter," said Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves, who declared a state of emergency Sunday night. "As we reflect on the death and resurrection on this Easter Sunday, we have faith that we will all rise together."

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.

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