

# 17 inches of rain devastate rural Tennessee; at least 10 die

August 22 2021, by Jonathan Mattise and R.j. Rico

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A mobile home and a truck trailer sit near a creek Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021, after they were washed away by flood waters the day before in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy rains caused flooding in Middle Tennessee and have resulted in multiple deaths as homes and rural roads were washed away. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

Rescue crews searched desperately Sunday amid shattered homes and

tangled debris for dozens of people still missing after record-breaking rain sent floodwaters surging through Middle Tennessee.

At least 10 people were killed, including twin toddlers who were swept from their father's arms, according to surviving family members. Authorities feared the [death toll](#) could rise.

The flooding in [rural areas](#) took out roads, cellphone towers and telephone lines, leaving families uncertain about whether their loved ones survived the unprecedented deluge. Emergency workers were searching door to door, said Kristi Brown, a coordinator for health and safety supervisor with Humphreys County Schools.

Humphreys County Sheriff Chris Davis said many of the missing live in the neighborhoods where the water rose the fastest. Their names were on a board in the county's emergency center.

Up to 17 inches (43 centimeters) of rain fell in the county in less than 24 hours Saturday, appearing to shatter the Tennessee record for one-day rainfall by more than 3 inches (8 centimeters), the National Weather Service said.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee toured the area, stopping on Main Street in Waverly where some homes were washed off their foundations and people were sifting through their water-logged possessions.



A truck and a car sit in a creek Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021, after they were washed away the day before in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy rains caused flooding in Middle Tennessee and have resulted in multiple deaths as homes and rural roads were washed away. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

Shirley Foster cried as the governor walked up. She said she just learned a friend from her church was dead.

"I thought I was over the shock of all this. I'm just tore up over my friend. My house is nothing, but my friend is gone," Foster told the governor.

The hardest-hit areas saw double the rain that area of Middle Tennessee had in the previous worst-case scenario for flooding, meteorologists said.

Lines of storms moved over the area for hours, wringing out a record amount of moisture—a scenario scientists have warned may be more common because of global warming.

The downpours rapidly turned the creeks that run behind backyards and through downtown Waverly into raging rapids. Business owner Kansas Klein stood on a bridge Saturday in the town of 4,500 people and saw two girls who were holding on to a puppy and clinging to a wooden board sweep past, the current too fast for anyone to grab them.



Michael Pate watches as a road is repaired Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021, in McEwen, Tenn. Pate repaired the road Saturday after heavy rain washed part of it away, but the road was damaged again when more rain fell Saturday night. Heavy rains caused flooding in Middle Tennessee and have resulted in multiple deaths as homes and rural roads were washed away. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

He isn't sure what happened to them. Klein heard that a girl and a puppy had been rescued downstream, and that another girl was also saved, but he wasn't sure it was them.

By Sunday, the floodwaters were gone, leaving behind debris from wrecked cars, demolished businesses and homes and a chaotic, tangled mix of the things inside.

"It was amazing how quick it came and how quick it left," Klein said.

The Humphrey County Sheriff Office [Facebook page](#) filled with people looking for missing friends and family. GoFundMe pages were made asking for help for funeral expenses for the dead, including [7-month-old twins](#) yanked from their father's arms as they tried to escape.

Not far from the bridge, Klein told The Associated Press by phone that dozens of buildings in a low-income housing area known as Brookside appeared to have borne the brunt of the flash flood from Trent Creek.



A road is repaired Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021, in McEwen, Tenn. The road was repaired Saturday after heavy rain washed part of it away, but the road was damaged again when more rain fell Saturday night. Heavy rains caused flooding in Middle Tennessee and have resulted in multiple deaths as homes and rural roads were washed away. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

**"It was devastating: buildings were knocked down, half of them were destroyed," Klein said. "People were pulling out bodies of people who had drowned and didn't make it out."**

Davis told news outlets Saturday about the 10 confirmed deaths and more than 30 people missing in his county, located about 60 miles (96 kilometers) west of Nashville.

The dead ranged from babies to elderly people and included one of his best friends, the sheriff of the county of 18,000 people told [WSVM-TV](#) on Sunday.

"Small town, small community. We know each other. We love each other," Davis said.

At the Cash Saver grocery in in Waverly, employees stood on desks, registers and a flower rack as the waters from the creek that's usually 400 feet (120 meters) from the store rushed in after devastating the low income housing next door. At one point, they tried to break through the ceiling into the attic and couldn't, store co-owner David Hensley said.



Debris from flooding is strewn along Sam Hollow Road following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The

Tennessean via AP

The [flood waters](#) stopped rising as fast just as the situation was getting dire and a rescue boat came by. "We told him that if there's somebody else out there you can get, go get them, we think we're OK," Hensley said.

Just to the east of Waverly, the town of McEwen was pummeled Saturday with 17.02 inches (43.2 centimeters) of rain, smashing the state's 24-hour record of 13.6 inches (34.5 centimeters) from 1982, according to [the National Weather Service](#) in Nashville, though Saturday's numbers would have to be confirmed.

A [flash flood watch](#) was issued for the area before the rain started, with forecasters saying 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of rain was possible. The worst storm recorded in this area of Middle Tennessee only dropped 9 inches (23 centimeters) of rain, said Krissy Hurley, a weather service meteorologist in Nashville.





Dickson Public Works personnel check the flooding on Old Pond Lane following heavy rainfall, Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Layers of pavement are ripped up from Harris Road following heavy rainfall and flooding on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



A driveway is washed away by flooding along Little Blue Creek Road following heavy rainfall Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Flooding is seen along Little Blue Creek Road following heavy rainfall Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Chairs picked up by flood water are strewn along Sam Hollow Road following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



The playground at Jason Chapel Church is covered in debris following heavy rainfall and flooding Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



With a waterline of dirt and small debris still clinging to her home, Joy Rhodes points to the flooded Garner Creek on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Joy Rhodes looks through a ruined calendar in her kitchen after her home flooded following heavy rainfall Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP





A muddy golf cart sits in a driveway of Gary and Joy Rhodes following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



The playground at Jason Chapel Church is covered in debris following heavy rainfall and flooding on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



The office of the Rhodes family is in disarray after their home flooded following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Debris from flooding is strewn along Sam Hollow Road following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Water covers Sam Hollow Road following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



A driveway bridge is washed away by flooding along Little Blue Creek Road following heavy rainfall Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy flooding in several Middle Tennessee counties on Saturday prompted water rescues, road closures, and communications disruptions, with several people reported missing. Flash flood warnings were in effect for Dickson, Houston and Montgomery and Stewart counties on Saturday evening. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



Ruined and muddied blankets sit on the ground with a photo frame in the spare bedroom of Joy and Gary Rhodes' home after their home flooded following heavy rainfall on Saturday, Aug. 21, 2021, in Dickson, Tenn. Credit: Josie Norris/The Tennessean via AP



A mobile home and a truck trailer sit near a creek Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021, after they were washed away by flood waters the day before in McEwen, Tenn. Heavy rains caused flooding in Middle Tennessee and have resulted in multiple deaths as homes and rural roads were washed away. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

"Forecasting almost a record is something we don't do very often," Hurley said. "Double the amount we've ever seen was almost unfathomable."

Recent scientific research has determined that extreme rain events will become more frequent because of man-made climate change. Hurley said it is impossible to know its exact role in Saturday's flood, but noted in the past year her office dealt with floods that used to be expected maybe once every 100 years [in September](#) south of Nashville and [in](#)



[March](#) closer to the city.

"We had an incredible amount of water in the atmosphere," Hurley said of Saturday's flooding. "Thunderstorms developed and moved across the same area over and over and over."

The problem isn't limited to Tennessee. A federal study found man-made climate change doubles the chances of the types of heavy downpours that in August 2016 dumped 26 inches (66 centimeters) of rain around Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Those floods killed at least 13 people and damaged 150,000 homes.

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