

South cleans up from tornadoes as blizzards advance north

December 15 2022, by JAKE BLEIBERG and KEVIN MCGILL



Visibility on I-94 in the Bismarck, N.D., Mandan area is greatly reduced due to blowing snow across the roadway in this view of westbound traffic on the Grant Marsh Bridge over the Missouri River on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022. Credit: Tom Stromme/The Bismarck Tribune via AP

Communities from Texas to Florida began assisting survivors and cleaning up Thursday after tornadoes left scattered destruction and at

least three people dead across the South. To the north, blizzards continued to pound the Midwest as more ice and snow headed toward New England.

Three straight days of volatile weather in the South continued as a possible tornado wrecked a building housing a cotton gin in rural Georgia and forecasters issued a stream of tornado warnings across the Florida peninsula.

The same storm front spawned twisters as it marched from central Texas across Louisiana, where all three storm deaths were confirmed, before destroying farm buildings in Mississippi and tearing roofs off other buildings in Alabama.

In Union Parish, Louisiana, near the Arkansas line, volunteers stocked a gymnasium with donated clothing and other supplies for dozens whose homes were badly damaged or destroyed.

"It shows that people love you," said Patsy Andrews, who survived the storm hunkered in a bathtub with her three children. "It shows that people care."

Andrews teared up as she recounted how winds blew open her front door early Wednesday in the Union County community of Farmerville as tornado alerts sounded. Windows started breaking with a popping noise like gunfire, she said, as the family crawled into the bathroom.



A long line up of over the road trucks lines both sides of Miriam Avenue near the Stamart Travel Center truck stop in east Bismarck, N.D., on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022. The trucks were waiting for I-94 to reopen after weather and road conditions on Wednesday, Dec. 14, forced closure of the east-west interstate highway. Credit: Tom Stromme/The Bismarck Tribune via AP

"The only thing we know to do was just crying, we was screaming, just calling on Jesus," Andrews said. She added: "We all grabbed each other, we jumped in the tub. All we could do was just pray. It was very devastating."

A few others caught in the storm's path weren't so fortunate.

An 8-year-old boy and his mother were killed in rural Keithville, Louisiana, when their mobile home was swept away Tuesday. Authorities found a third victim outside a home in St. Charles Parish, west of New Orleans, after a possible tornado struck the opposite corner of the state Wednesday.

The National Weather Service can take days to confirm whether destructive winds were in fact tornadoes. Data compiled by the Southern Regional Climate Center at Texas A&M University showed nearly 50 tornadoes reported across six states since Tuesday—the vast majority of them in Louisiana and Mississippi.



A Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (Penn Dot) plow truck scraps the ice and sleet away on route 56 in Johnstown, Pa., on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022. Credit: Todd Berkey/The Tribune-Democrat via AP

In Mississippi, a suspected tornado destroyed four large chicken houses, one containing 5,000 roosters, Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey said. In Summerville, Alabama, Fire Chief Michael Aaron said storm winds tore away roofing and downed power lines.

State emergency managers said four people were also injured in storms. Three of those were in the Mississippi Delta's Sharkey County, where storms hit a mobile home park in Anguilla on Wednesday. One person was injured in Hinds County, home to the capital city of Jackson.

Before the storm front started moving offshore, police in rural Doerun, Georgia, reported that a suspected tornado struck a large building housing a cotton gin, leaving a sagging heap of bent metal. No injuries were reported, the police department said in a Facebook post.

Further to the north, the National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings Thursday in the Dakotas as well as portions of Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska. As the storm moves eastward, interior parts of the Northeast could accumulate as much as one foot (30 centimeters) of snow, said Zach Taylor, a weather service meteorologist in College Park, Maryland.



People help each other through the rubble after a tornado tore through the area in Killona, La., about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. James Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert

"It really, truly has been a coast-to-coast winter storm that has affected a large portion of the country, and that doesn't begin to even mention the severe weather in the South," Taylor said.

Roger Hainy, who owns a farm near Wessington Springs in central South Dakota, said he was shut in after blowing snow formed drifts that made the roads impassable. Hainy's farm lost power earlier in the week when freezing rain hit the area.

"Back when I was a kid we used to have three-day blizzards, but this one

is going to be four days," Hainy said. "It's been a long time since we've had one like this."

In Bismarck, North Dakota, an additional four inches (10 centimeters) of snow were expected Thursday to top a foot that has already accumulated. Wind gusts of 60 miles per hour (96 kph) prompted a no-travel advisory for major highways.



People survey damage following a tornado at the Iberia Medical Center, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022, in New Iberia, La. Credit: Leslie Westbrook/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP

"The wind and ice—it's miserable, and a lot of people are in the ditches,"

said Dean Cota, manager of the Starnart Travel Center, where the parking lot was full of truckers waiting out the storm. "Everything's just slick and it's blowing vehicles right off the road."

Blizzard conditions pelted Minnesota, leaving thousands without power and blanketing roads with ice and snow.

Brianna Vatalaro, 21, in northern Minnesota said she lost power and heat in her home for more than six hours Thursday morning and watched 50-foot trees fall on powerlines, creating blue and green sparks outside her house.

She thought about "all the things that could possibly go wrong," like not being able to charge or use her phone in an emergency, or needing to help her stepmom who uses a breathing machine that requires power.



Damage is seen along Schoolhouse Road after a tornado moved through area in Killona, La., Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: Brett Duke/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate via AP



Destruction is seen from a tornado that tore through the area in Killona, La., about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. James Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert



A house and car are seen damaged after a confirmed tornado on Friscoville Avenue in Arabi, La., in St. Bernard Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton



Debris is strewn about following severe weather Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022, in Keithville, La. A volatile storm ripping across the U.S. spawned tornadoes that killed a young boy and his mother in Louisiana, smashed mobile homes and chicken houses in Mississippi and threatened neighboring Southern states with more punishing weather Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Jake Bleiberg



Vehicles and debris are strewn about after a tornado that tore through the area in Killona, La., about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. James Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert



Allyson Mitchell walks in the rain after she arrived to help her niece whose home was destroyed from a tornado that tore through the area in Killona, La., about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. James Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022.
Credit: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert



Debris is piled up following severe weather Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022, in Keithville, La. A volatile storm ripping across the U.S. spawned tornadoes that killed a young boy and his mother in Louisiana, smashed mobile homes and chicken houses in Mississippi and threatened neighboring Southern states with more punishing weather Wednesday. Credit: AP Photo/Jake Bleiberg



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CORRECTS LAST NAME TO BOVIE NOT BOVIEM - Chelsi Bovie holds her niece's dog that she rescued from her home after a tornado tore through the area in Killona, La., about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. James Parish, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Gerald Herbert



A greenhouse sits on a fence in the backyard of Randy Popiel's home after a possible tornado in Grapevine, Texas, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2022. Credit: Elías Valverde II/The Dallas Morning News via AP



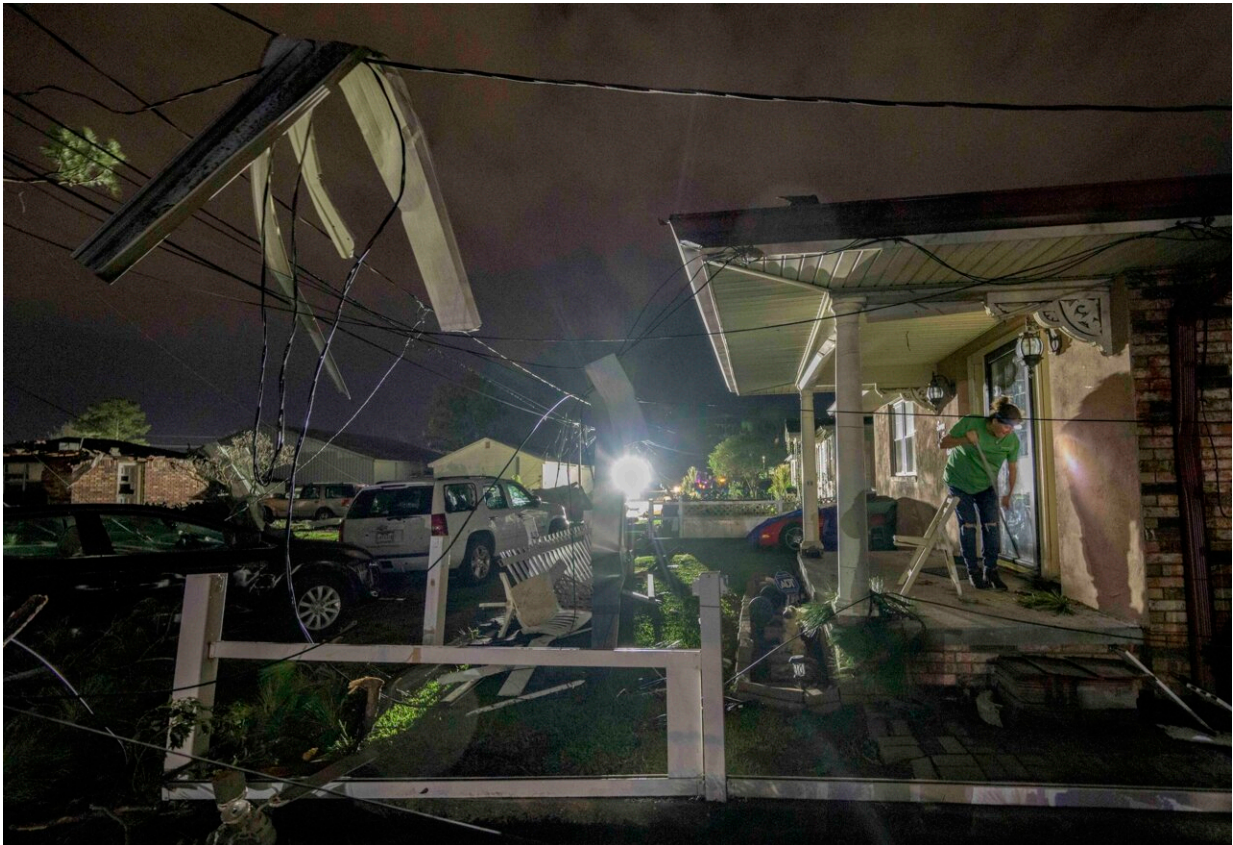
A Winn-Dixie employee talks to a customer telling them the store is closed after the facade had fallen down due to a tornado in Gretna, La., in Jefferson Parish neighboring New Orleans, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. No one was injured at the store. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Hinton



With no electricity, Roy Fitch uses a head lamp to survey tornado damage to his home on MacArthur Ave in Gretna, La., in Jefferson Parish neighboring New Orleans, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. AP Photo/Matthew Hinton)



Power lines and metal roofing are seen in a tornado damaged neighborhood in Gretna, La., in Jefferson Parish neighboring New Orleans, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. AP Photo/Matthew Hinton)



Anna Chiasson sweeps her neighbors porch which was damaged down due to a tornado in Gretna, La., in Jefferson Parish neighboring New Orleans, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. AP Photo/Matthew Hinton)

Vatalaro tried driving to her job at Home Depot but gave up within five blocks, she said, after seeing trucks spin out on the highway and hopping out of her car to help push a man's vehicle out of ice and snow. "It's been chaotic," she said.

In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state is well prepared for several inches of snow expected in some areas over the coming days. During a briefing in Albany, Hochul said there's also a chance that strong winds could topple power lines.

"We have utility crews all set, already on the ground, ready to respond as quickly as possible," she said.

Forecasters expect more blizzard conditions in places across the Upper Midwest, and ice and snow from the central Appalachians into the Northeast. The National Weather Service issued an ice storm warning Thursday in parts of four states and a winter storm warning through Friday night from Pennsylvania to Maine. The weather service said heavy snowfall is expected across portions of interior New York and New England through the weekend with storm totals expected to reach one to two feet.

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