

'Most everything wiped away': Tornado kills at least 25 in Mississippi

March 25 2023, by Gianrigo MARLETTA



A destroyed neighborhood in Rolling Fork, Mississippi is seen on March 25, 2023 after a tornado touched down.

At least 25 people were killed by devastating tornadoes that ripped across the southern US state of Mississippi, tearing off roofs, smashing

cars and flattening entire neighborhoods, with the region readying for more severe weather Sunday.

The powerful weather system, accompanied by thunderstorms and driving rain, cut a path of more than 100 miles (60 kilometers) across the state late Friday, slamming several towns along the way.

Mississippi's emergency management agency put the death toll at 25, and said dozens more were injured. Four people reported missing "have been found," it added.

And in Alabama, one man died after being trapped when a trailer overturned in the severe weather, the sheriff's office in Morgan County said on Twitter.

In Rolling Fork, home to fewer than 2,000 people, an entire row of houses and buildings was demolished, leaving only scattered debris. Cars were overturned, fences ripped up and trees uprooted.

President Joe Biden ordered federal aid to Mississippi on Sunday to support local recovery efforts.

The funding will provide grants for temporary housing, home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, the White House said in a statement.

Some 4,800 customers were without power in Mississippi, and nearly 11,000 homes and businesses remained in the dark in neighboring Alabama, monitor.poweroutage.us reported.



This image obtained from the Mississippi Highway Patrol shows emergency personnel on Highway 49 near Silver City after a tornado touched down.

Mississippi was meanwhile girding for more turbulent weather Sunday, including damaging winds and hail, with the emergency management agency warning that "tornadoes cannot be ruled out."

Patricia Perkins, who works at a hardware store in Rolling Fork, told AFP that "most everything is wiped away."

Resident Shanta Howard described to local TV how members of the community had to help remove the dead from the wreckage.

"It's way worse than I thought. All of the businesses on Highway 61 are gone," Ricky Cox, whose seed supply store was wrecked, told AFP, saying two friends died when their homes were hit.

"My city is gone," Rolling Fork Mayor Eldridge Walker told CNN.
"Devastation—as I look from left to right, that's all I see.

"A lot of families are hurting. This community is in a situation that we never expected.

"Houses that are torn up can be replaced but we can't replace a life."



Aerial view of a building flattened by a tornado in Rolling Fork, Mississippi.

Search and rescue operations were underway in Sharkey County, home to Rolling Fork—about 60 miles northwest of the state capital Jackson—and in neighboring counties.

Fatalities also occurred in Humphreys, Carroll and Monroe counties, the emergency management agency said.

"The loss will be felt in these towns forever," state Governor Tate Reeves said on Twitter. "Please pray for God's hand to be over all who lost family and friends."

President Biden called the images from Mississippi "heartbreaking".

"We will do everything we can to help. We will be there as long as it takes," he said in a statement.

'Constant cry' for help

Storm chaser Aaron Rigsby told AFP he arrived in Rolling Fork right after the storm hit, in the pouring rain and with "lightning still all around."

"When I got there, it was just a constant cry of voices screaming for help from people that were trapped," he said, adding he helped residents to free a few people from their destroyed homes.



Eddie Jones repairs a window on his damaged house in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, after the area was hit by a tornado.

The National Weather Service issued a rare tornado emergency for Rolling Fork and surrounding areas at 9:00 pm Friday, warning people to seek shelter from life-threatening conditions and forecasting golf ball-sized hail.

The NWS warned residents that as clean-up operations continue, "dangers remain even after the storms move on."

Tornadoes, a weather phenomenon notoriously difficult to predict, are relatively common in the United States, especially in the central and southern parts of the country.

In January, a series of damaging twisters, all on the same day, left several people dead in Alabama and Georgia.

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Citation: 'Most everything wiped away': Tornado kills at least 25 in Mississippi (2023, March 25) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-03-city-gonetornado-mississippi.html>

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