

One killed as tornado hits south Texas near the Gulf coast, damaging dozens of homes

May 14 2023, by JULIO CORTEZ, VALERIE GONZALEZ, and KEN MILLER



A person stands outside of a damaged home after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez

One person was killed and a curfew was imposed after a powerful tornado tore through a community near the southern tip of Texas before dawn Saturday, damaging dozens of residences and knocking down power lines, authorities said.

At least 10 others were hospitalized, including two people who were listed in [critical condition](#), said Tom Hushen, the emergency management coordinator for Cameron County. Many residents also suffered cuts and bruises.

A nighttime curfew for those 17 and under was issued by Eddie Treviño Jr., the Cameron County judge, and is expected to end May 16 to "mitigate the effects of this public health and safety emergency." The order also forbids non-residents of Laguna Heights from entering its residential areas.

The tornado hit at about 4 a.m. as most people were in their homes asleep in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, located on the mainland across from South Padre Island, off the Gulf of Mexico. The county has among the highest poverty rates in Texas and is dotted with substandard housing.

There was no advance warning. Instead, the first warning of a tornado "went out at the same time it was touching ground," said Barry Goldsmith, a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Brownsville.



People salvage items from a home after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez

"With hurricanes we have the benefit of getting some advance warning; we know it's probably on its way," Treviño said during a Saturday press conference. "With a tornado, like Barry mentioned, it's not a common scenario unless we have a hurricane/tropical cyclone in the area. So, we didn't have the benefit of a warning."

"The hour didn't help," Treviño added.

Roberto Flores, 42, died after being "basically crushed as a result of the

damage to his mobile home," Treviño said.

The storm was clocked with wind speeds of 86-110 mph (138-177 kph) and was categorized as an EF1 tornado, according to the [weather service](#). It lasted only about two to four minutes but it ravaged the area.

As many as 60 homes were damaged. The county judge signed a disaster declaration, and a temporary shelter in the nearby city of Port Isabel was providing help to 38 people.



Damage is seen after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



People salvage items from a home after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



A man stands outside of his home after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas, near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



A woman stands outside of her home after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



People salvage items from the second level of a building after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



The frame, top left, of a mobile home rests atop a home and a vehicles after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



People salvage items from a destroyed home after a tornado hit Texas, Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



The roof is torn off a home surrounded by debris following a tornado touching down Saturday, May 13, 2023, in Laguna Heights, Texas. At least one person was killed when a tornado struck an unincorporated community on the Gulf coast near the southern tip of Texas, damaging dozens of homes and knocking down power lines early Saturday, authorities said. Credit: Denise Cathey/The Brownsville Herald via AP



A home is separated from its porch by high winds and pushed into a neighbor's fence Saturday, May 13, 2023, after a tornado touched down in Laguna Heights, Texas. At least one person was killed when a tornado struck an unincorporated community on the Gulf coast near the southern tip of Texas, damaging dozens of homes and knocking down power lines early Saturday, authorities said. Credit: Denise Cathey/The Brownsville Herald via AP



Damage is seen after a tornado hit Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



Damage is seen after a tornado hit in Port Isabel, Texas, Saturday, May 13, 2023, in the unincorporated community of Laguna Heights, Texas near South Padre Island. Authorities say one person was killed when a tornado struck the southernmost tip of Texas on the Gulf coast. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez



A U.S. Customs and Border Protection vehicle drives past a home damaged by a tornado Saturday, May 13, 2023, in Laguna Heights, Texas. At least one person was killed when a tornado struck an unincorporated community on the Gulf coast near the southern tip of Texas, damaging dozens of homes and knocking down power lines early Saturday, authorities said. Credit: Denise Cathey/The Brownsville Herald via AP



Juan Gomez holds up a power line insulator blown onto his property which he jokes is a souvenir of his experience following a tornado touching down Saturday, May 13, 2023, in Laguna Heights, Texas. At least one person was killed when a tornado struck an unincorporated community on the Gulf coast near the southern tip of Texas, damaging dozens of homes and knocking down power lines early Saturday, authorities said. Credit: Denise Cathey/The Brownsville Herald via AP



Broken glass and other debris hang from the back of an apartment complex after a tornado removed its roof Saturday, May 13, 2023, in Laguna Heights, Texas. At least one person was killed when a tornado struck an unincorporated community on the Gulf coast near the southern tip of Texas, damaging dozens of homes and knocking down power lines early Saturday, authorities said. Credit: Denise Cathey/The Brownsville Herald via AP

"Apparently it went straight through that community," said county sheriff Eric Garza. "Individuals don't want to leave their houses because they're afraid that somebody will go in there and start stealing stuff."

Garza said his department is helping provide security for the area.

Laguna Heights is about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northeast of the

U.S.-Mexico border at Brownsville and is not prone to having tornados, although this spring has been active, said weather service meteorologist Angelica Soria. The area is also gearing up for the start of hurricane season.

The Texas tornado follows an outbreak of dozens of twisters in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado that caused damage but no reported deaths.

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