

Gaylord, Michigan residents left without FEMA aid in the aftermath of devastating tornado

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On May 20, 2022, an EF3 tornado touched down in the city of Gaylord in northern Michigan, carving a path of destruction 200 yards wide and 16 miles long. The tornado killed two people and injured over 40 others.

The tornado had peak winds of 150 miles per hour. One insurance company said it expects to handle up to 1,200 auto and home claims from the storm and estimated its clients would have auto and home damage of \$5 million to \$10 million.

According to UpNorthLive meteorologist Joe Charlevoix, tornadoes in Michigan are relatively infrequent. Michigan averages about 16 tornadoes a year with most of them across the southern part of the state.

Despite their infrequency, every single one of Michigan's 83 counties has experienced a tornado, according to records kept by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration dating back to 1950. The Gaylord tornado was the deadliest EF3 to touch down in the state since 1980.

Gaylord, population 4,286, is about 230 miles northwest of Detroit and is a popular all-seasons tourist destination. Since tornadoes are less common in northern sections of the state, the city does not have tornado sirens. Residents with mobile phones were only warned through a "code red" alert from the weather service about 10 minutes before the tornado hit.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to Gaylord residents and visited the Nottingham Forest mobile home park, one of the areas with the most significant damage, which was largely laid to waste by the tornado and where both deaths occurred.

According to an article in UpNorthLive, when a tornado strikes, residents in mobile homes are up to 20 times more likely to die than those in traditional homes. Exacerbating the situation, the state of Michigan does not require trailer

parks to provide tornado shelters for residents. While some have built community centers and gathering places to shelter in the event of a storm, Nottingham Forest was not among them.

One resident who spoke to the WSWS noted that many of the trailers at Nottingham Forest did not have anchor cables to keep them from being tossed in the wind. In the aftermath of the destruction, many residents have had difficulty gathering their belongings from the wreckage. This difficulty has been compounded by the decision by park management to begin bulldozing homes that were severely damaged by the tornado.

"They are still bulldozing," the resident reported. "They put out a statement saying they were not doing exactly what they were doing. Individual residents are going to have to sue the park owner."

He noted that there were many problems at the trailer park even before the destruction caused by the tornado.

"Before the tornado the water was dirty. I paid \$22,300 for my trailer and I paid that off two years ago. And I paid the park owner the title transfer fee and I have been waiting for the title for two years. When the tornado happened I said, 'When am I going to get that title?' And the park manager, told me that because of COVID restrictions it was running late.

"So I went down to the Secretary of State and ran the VIN and title number off of the paperwork from buying the house and it turns out this guy never bothered putting the house in his name. It is in some other people's name. Whether he neglectfully forgot to sign the title or he was too cheap I do not care, it was criminal and it was against the law, and if I were to have done it to somebody else I would surely go to jail."

The Nottingham Forest resident has had to pay \$415 per month for his trailer to sit on its lot. He said he had to

“pay it this month even though there is water there but there is nothing else. You cannot live there.”

He alleged that the park owner has used illegal means to remove other residents from their homes in the past.

“He finds a way to put a condemned sticker on the house, then kick the people out without ever giving them a title because of the house being condemned. Then pull the sticker off and move somebody back in. As a matter of fact, the lot next to me was an example of just that happening.”

Erin Mann, executive director of the Otsego County United Way, told the WSWS that while the tornado impacted residents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, the destruction from the tornado has hit low-income residents particularly hard.

There were a total of 210 homes and approximately 30 businesses damaged in the tornado. Thirty-three of those 210 were completely destroyed and a further 30 have around 50 percent damage to the structure.

Mann explained that the threshold to qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance for the city of Gaylord is \$16 million in uninsured damage. Since most of the damage occurred to mobile homes with values around \$10,000, that threshold will not be reached, meaning that no FEMA funding will be made available to the city or residents who have been displaced or have had significant damage to their property.

As of this writing United Way had raised nearly \$97,000, and case managers have been assisting residents with gas stipends and temporary housing. They have also collected toiletries, food, gas cards and other supplies to help residents get to and from school and work while further arrangements are made.

“This is going to be a marathon, not a sprint,” Mann explained to the *Detroit Free Press*. “We are going to be responding to this for a long time. ... we just lost one of our largest low-income housing areas ... and we already have a housing crisis in Ostego County.”



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