

Tornadoes kill 23 across five states over Memorial Day holiday weekend

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At least 23 people were killed across five states in the southern US on Saturday night and into Sunday as severe weather systems destroyed homes, businesses and knocked out power for hundreds of thousands during the Memorial Day holiday weekend.

The storms stretched from the Great Lakes region to the Southeast, with catastrophic and deadly destruction concentrated in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama and Kentucky. According to data published by the Climate and Space Sciences Engineering School at the University of Michigan, as of this writing there were 37 tornadoes reported in the US in the previous 48 hours.

More than 110 million people remained at risk of severe weather on Monday, mainly in the East Coast, as the storms continued moving eastward and threatened the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington D.C areas. Tornado watches were issued from North Carolina to Maryland.

In the immediate aftermath of the storms, more than 25 million people are under heat alerts, mainly across east and south Texas and central and southern Louisiana and Mississippi, over the next two days. Heat index measurements could top 119 degrees in Laredo, Texas, and 113 degrees in Austin, and Houston.

In **Texas**, at least seven people were killed by tornadoes, including two children ages 2 and 5 from the same family, and nearly 100 people were injured. All of the deaths took place in Cooke County, which is north of Dallas on the border with Oklahoma.

CNN reported that Laura Esparza and her children Marco, 10, and Miranda, 16, died after their trailer was thrown across a street.

The storm was preliminarily rated by the National Weather Service as an EF-2 system with winds as high as 135 miles per hour. According to Cooke County Sheriff Ray Sappington, the storm tore through the

Gateway AP Travel Center truck stop near Valley View, Texas, before moving through a community of manufactured homes.

Sheriff Sappington warned people that conditions in the area remain dangerous. He told news media, “I know some people were out of the area and trying to get back, but it’s dangerous out there. Power lines are down. There have been reports of gas leaks.”

Most of the deaths occurred at the FRF Estates in Valley View. Drone fly-over video posted on YouTube shows the devastation, including homes and buildings completely shredded and torn off their foundations and debris strewn throughout the area.

Hugo Parra, from Farmers Branch, north of Dallas, told the Associated Press he rode out the storm with 40 to 50 people in the bathroom of the Valley View truck stop. The storm took the roof and walls off the building, mangling metal beams and battering cars outside in the parking lot.

Parra said, “A firefighter came to check on us and he said, ‘You’re very lucky.’ The best way to describe this is the wind tried to rip us out of the bathrooms.” Those injured were transported by ambulance and helicopter to hospitals in Denton County to the south of the tornado zone.

In **Oklahoma**, two people were killed in the city of Pryor, northeast of Tulsa, and several others were injured, according to state officials. Survey teams from the National Weather Service also found damage in Claremore, to the west of Pryor, indicating the tornado was at least a category EF-3 with wind speeds between 136 and 165 mile per hour. CNN reported that three horses were euthanized at Will Rogers Downs, which was in the direct path of that tornado, according to a spokesperson for the Oklahoma Thoroughbred Racing Association.

In **Alabama**, one person was killed by a large tree that fell onto a residential building in Mountain Brook, a suburb of Birmingham, according to the local fire department. The storms brought wind gusts of up to 70 miles per hour and large hail.

At least eight people were killed in **Arkansas** from the storms according to Cindy Murphy, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Public Safety.

Large amounts of debris were left in parts of the state's northwest, the officials said. According to Lori Arnold-Ellis, a spokesperson for the American Red Cross of Greater Arkansas, the storms removed the roofs of houses and left a lot of downed trees.

The *New York Times* reported that one person died in Benton County and multiple others were injured, according to the local authorities who said on Sunday that the area had likely been hit by tornadoes.

Officials in Harrison said a woman died in a house in Boone County. A local sheriff reported on Facebook that a 73-year-old woman was found dead yards from where her mobile home had stood in Baxter County. The sheriff's office in Marion County said two people were killed there.

In **Kentucky**, five people were killed according to Governor Andy Beshear. Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg reported at least one person was killed in the city when a tree fell on him during the storms. In Charleston, video recordings showed cars tossed into piles of debris along with the remains of houses.

In the aftermath of the tornadoes, the White House released a statement from President Biden that gave typical words about prayers and condolences for the deaths but said nothing about what the US government is doing to either prepare the public for increasingly severe weather events driven by capitalist-induced climate change or give details about what the government is doing to help those in need. He also did not offer any explanation for what is behind the growth of deadly storms across the country.

State officials such as Texas Republican Governor Gregg Abbott made similar statements and told residents to file online reports about the damage they have experienced and to contact their insurance providers.

Meteorologists have been pointing consistently to the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather in recent years. Experts have explained that global

warming driven largely by the industrial emission of carbon dioxide is worsening extreme weather patterns and that thunderstorms and record shattering floods are increasingly likely along with tornadoes, hurricanes and droughts.

The months of April and May have already shown an increase in such weather events. April had the second highest number of tornadoes in the US on record, according to the National Weather Service. This year is already 25 percent ahead of the average number of previous year twisters, according to the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

According to weather experts at CNN, the widespread severe storms pounding the eastern half of the US created so much hazardous weather Sunday that it was the most active severe storm day of the year. The report said, "There were at least 632 preliminary reports of severe weather Sunday spanning from Wyoming to New Hampshire, according to Storm Prediction Center data. The previous high was 565 reports on May 8."



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