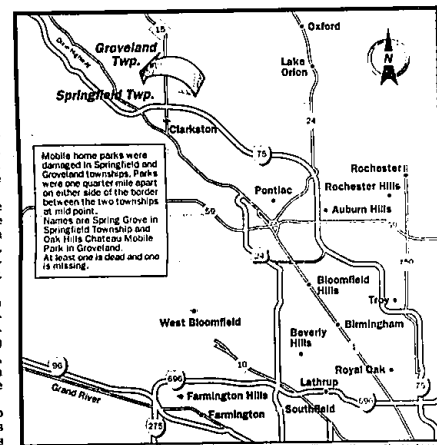


Destroyed: Daniel Poniatowski, 28, of Springfield Township stands in the middle of what's left of his home. A tornado ripped through two mobile home parks, killing one woman, destroying 20 mobile homes and damaging another 50.



Death and devastation: U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee (left), tours the two mobile home parks where a tornado touched down Wednesday. Kildee and Springfield Township Clerk Nancy Strole talk with homeowner Jodi Brown, 28, whose best friend died in the storm.

Staff Photos By Steve Cantrell



Gulezian said. An "F-5" (like the one featured in the movie "Twister") are the strongest,

with winds from 261 to 318 miles per hour.

Warning system worked — officials

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland officials are confident the county's emergency warning system was adequate, even though warning sirens didn't sound until after a tornado touched down in Springfield and Graveland townships, killing one person and injuring scores more.

"From what we know now, the warning system worked well," County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said Thursday after a briefing on the massive storm that hit Oakland and other counties in southeast Michigan.

"We're taking a look at the system and the personnel involved," Patterson said. "But from what we've seen so far, the system worked as it

was supposed to."

Some residents in Springfield and Graveland townships where damage was estimated at \$1.8 million Thursday — complained they didn't have ample warning.

Officials admit the county's sirens didn't go off until 6:35 p.m., activated by reports of the sighting of the tornado in the Holly area.

Oakland County has 160 sirens in a system initiated after a March 1976 tornado in West Bloomfield.

Gail A. Novak, chief of the county's emergency management unit, said the sirens are only part of the entire warning system that also relies on radio and television broadcasts — and

common sense.

"A 'tornado watch' was issued shortly after 1 p.m.," Novak said. "The warning was adequate. But people didn't respond. They didn't have a plan."

"The media can do a big service by reminding people they should have a plan for emergencies like this," she added.

Two Oakland County fatalities were attributed to the storm, which was blamed for as many as nine deaths in 17 counties, according to early estimates. Twelve tornadoes were reported in the area that stretched from Midland to Monroe counties and from St. Clair to Hillsdale.

In Springfield and Graveland, two mobile home parks were damaged by high winds or tornadoes. Seventy mobile homes in those parks were damaged, including at least 16 that were torn up or blown off their slab foundations.

One woman — whose name was being withheld Thursday — was killed when her mobile home was destroyed in the Oak Hills Chateau Mobile Park.

There were scores of people injured, said Novak, "but none seriously. As far as we know now, nobody was hospitalized."

Novak said the lack of serious injuries and more deaths is an indication the warning system was effective — even though sirens didn't go off until after the tornado touched down.

The sirens are not activated until a tornado is sighted by radar or by spotter. Novak said. "But we started the warning system much earlier. We knew this was a mean system."

The National Weather Service facility in White Lake Township issued its first warning about 1:15 p.m., according to meteorologist Dean Gulezian. The service issued a tornado warning — meaning conditions were ripe for thunderstorms that produce tornadoes — for Oakland and most of southeast Michigan.

Such warnings are routinely sent to radio and television stations to be included in normal broadcasting, he said.

"A warning means tornadoes can develop," he said, and even in that area about 15 minutes before police and fire stations in the Holly area began getting calls about the tornado touching down.

At 5:21 p.m., Gulezian said, the weather service issued a Severe Thunderstorm Warning specifically for Oakland County. That was about 15 minutes before police and fire stations in the Holly area began getting calls about the tornado touching down.

That warning said the area could expect hail and winds gusting as high as 100 miles per hour, said Gulezian. "By that time, people should have been getting ready to seek cover," he said.

"Actually, people should be more concerned about a severe thunderstorm warning when a tornado warning," Gulezian said. "They can cause as much damage as a tornado, but they affect a larger area."

The severe thunderstorm warning was changed to a "tornado warning" (meaning a tornado has been sighted or spotted) about 5:40 p.m., Gulezian said, based on reports from spotters in the Holly area who saw the twister.

Weather service personnel who went to the mobile home parks confirmed that a tornado was an "F-1" (on the Fujita Scale) hit the area, Gulezian said.

"F-1" tornadoes are considered the weakest, with winds between 42 and 72 miles per hour,

They dove for cover from storm

By KAREN HERMES SMITH
AND JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITERS

"It was full of sand and dust and paper. It sounded like wheels moving... the pressure."

That's how 39-year-old Rick Webber describes the tornado he saw through the front window of his mobile home just before he grabbed his 10-year-old daughter, Jessica, and ran into the bathroom.

It was all over in 30 seconds, he said.

And while Wheeler and his child were not hurt, what a devastating 30 seconds it was — killing one woman, destroying 20 mobile homes and damaging another 60, according to Springfield Township Supervisor Collin Walls, who said the estimated damage is between \$1.8 and \$2 million.

The timing wasn't great, but it's fortunate a tornado that struck two Springfield Township area mobile homes when it did. Wheeler said the twister struck around 6:15 p.m., but officials said the first siren went off at 6:35 p.m. and that fire officials were receiving siren calls around 6:35 p.m.

If it had, police said, more people would have been home from work and one fatality may have turned into many more injured and killed.

"Another hour and we would have had a real problem," said Lt. Dale LaBrie of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. "We got a break on time."

Oakland County Emergency Operations coordinator Lianne Robinson agreed, "I think it

could have been worse."

U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee (D-Flint) toured the area Thursday morning with Springfield Township Supervisor Collin Walls and Clerk Nancy Strole. Kildee will attempt to secure funding for the Federal Emergency Management Area.

Dan Stallard, 28, lost almost everything in the twister. The tornado spared his girlfriend, Jodi Brown, 28, and their three children — Brandon, 2; Cody, 7, and Cassandra, 8.

Residents of Chateau Oak Hill in Springfield Township, their mobile home and its contents were destroyed.

"We lost everything we had," said Brown. "We had no insurance. Look at my home. Look at my car. I can't believe my baby lived."

She almost lost her youngest son and she did lose her best friend, Lisa Bowman, 33, Brown said, adding that her friend was a cook at the Groveland Bar who also worked with impaired children. She said Bowman leaves behind a 13-year-old son.

Brown was returning from the clubhouse after paying her rent when the tornado hit. Weighing less than 100 pounds, the woman did all she could to hold on.

"I threw myself to the ground and dug my hands into the earth," she said. "A shed blew so close to my head it touched my hair."

Meanwhile, the baby-sitter, Debbie Skinner, grabbed the two older children and laid on top of them, but 2-year-old Brandon

got away from her.

"She decided to pray for him and save the other two," Jodi said, explaining that the sifter could do only so much.

The 2-year-old ran to the enclosed porch, but got trapped between the porch foundation and the trailer. Soon after a neighbor drove in and watched as the enclosed porch was ripped away from its foundation. When she saw Brandon's head between the porch and the trailer, she rescued him. The toddler was not seriously injured.

The couple had been saving their money and Dan said the tragedy will push them to get a house. "It's probably the best thing that could have ever happened," he said, adding afterward, "I definitely am grieving. Three hundred dollars a month rent. Where are you going to live for \$300 a month with a yard for the kids?"

The family will be staying with Stallard's mother on Groveland Road or Jodi's friend in Holly.

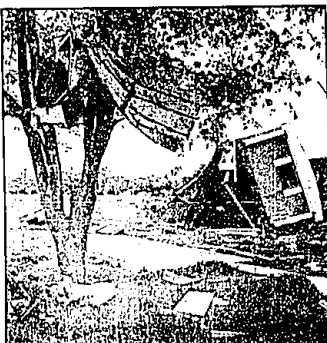
Important numbers

The following numbers have been established for storm victims seeking relief or for those wanting to make contributions:

■ Southeastern Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross — 1 (800) 774-6066 for those seeking assistance, and (313) 833-2630 for those seeking to make financial contributions.

■ St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in Holly — (248) 634-4661.

Twisted: A tornado tossed the roof of one Springfield Township mobile home into a tree which sits in front of the foundation of another home which lay twisted in the background.



The following road construction projects are taking place in Oakland County. However, for the July 4th holiday weekend until 6 a.m. July 7, projects with a * designation are halted:

■ **Bingham Farms** — Due to deteriorating roads, all five miles of local roadway will be repaved with a layer of chip seal expected to be completed by mid-July. Mile roads will not be repaved since they are not local roadways.

■ **Birmingham** — Derby between Adams and Coolidge and Buckingham between St. Andrews and Coolidge are being resurfaced with an expected completion date of late July. Derby will be closed during construction except to residential traffic.

■ **Farmington** — Grand River will be widened to include a left turn lane and traffic signal at the Shawwassee intersection. Shawwassee intersection, Farmington Road, will be closed during construction. Work is scheduled to begin July 15 and be completed by Sept. 30.

■ **Farmington Hills** — The 1996 widening project along Eight Mile, between Halsted and Farmington roads, to five lanes, is continuing. The remaining one and a quarter miles through the Farmington Road intersection is expected to be completed Aug. 22. Intermittent lane closures are possible. Expansion of the Haggerty Connector (M-6) has closed 13 Mile Road, between Haggerty and Meadowbrook, until Aug. 1. Repair work has started on the 10 Mile bridge over I-96/275 with an expected completion in late October. There will be hourly closures on I-96/275, and 10 Mile is restricted to one lane in each direction until July 30. Rhoadwood, a gravel road off of Gill Road and south of 9 Mile, is being paved with an expected completion in mid-July. The Farmington Road bridge over I-96 is shut down for deck replacement and will reopen Aug. 19. Traffic will be detoured along 11 Mile, 12 Mile and Orchard Lake and a lane shift will be in place for east and westbound I-96/275 travelers with intermittent lane closures. A traffic signal is being installed at Halsted Road just south of I-96 at the Amerisure insurance company business entrance. The signal is scheduled to be in service by July 11. Paving and drainage improvements have started at the west end of the Meadowbrook Hills subdivision near 8 Mile and Halsted. All streets will be repaved with east end work beginning in mid-July and the project completed Sept. 16.

■ **Independence Township** — *White Lake Road near Andersonville Road is closed to through traffic. It is being widened to three lanes and realigned with Nolley Road. Detours route drivers down Dixie Highway to Andersonville until the expected completion in November when the southern portion of White Lake Road will be turned into a cul-de-sac instead of intersecting Andersonville.

■ **Novi** — Expansion of the Haggerty Connector (M-6) has closed 13 Mile Road, between Haggerty

and Meadowbrook, until Aug. 1. Repair work has started on the 10 Mile bridge over I-96/275 with an expected completion in late October. There will be hourly closures on I-96/275 and a permanent lane closure on east and westbound 10 Mile until July 30.

■ **Orchard Lake** — Paving is expected to start July 7 on Lakeview, Pine Tree, and Sunbeam streets in the RC Bankers Sandy Beach Subdivision. The project is expected to be completed July 21.

■ **Oxford** — An overlay of pavement will be added to East Street between Washington and Glaspie and on W. Burdick between Polly Anne Trail and the west village limit after July 1 and completed by Nov. 1.

■ **Rochester** — The first phase of the Sheldon Road Extension is under construction to create a bypass through the city of Rochester. The half-mile stretch of two-lane roadway is being constructed from east Second Street to Parkdale. The roadway will be east of Miller and is expected to be open for traffic Aug. 15.

■ **Rochester Hills** — Hamlin Road is being reconstructed to a four-lane boulevard from M-69 to Crooks Road. The project, which is expected to be completed by the spring of 1998, will include the completion of the east-west link from the new M-69 ramp to various business facilities. The roadway is closed with detours across M-69 and Avon Road.

■ **Southfield** — J.L. Hudson Drive over M-10 is closed for repairs until Sept. 2. Traffic is detoured along the service drives, Mount Vernon Street bridge over the Lodge Freeway (M-10) will be closed for painting and deck work beginning July 21 and completed Aug. 19. Greenfield bridge over the Northwestern Highway (M-10) is under construction for deck replacement with southbound Greenfield closed and traffic detoured along Pembroke. Lanes are expected to reopen Oct. 30, 1997. Deteriorated residential roadways on the western border of Lathrup Village, east of Berkshire between Winchester and 11 Mile, have been paved with intersection and driveway approach work will continue until the end of August. Residential roadways east of Leasher and west of Arlington between Winchester and 11 Mile are undergoing spot concrete replacement to be completed by Oct. 31.

■ **Troy** — Derby between Adams and Coolidge and Derby between St. Andrews and Coolidge are being resurfaced with an expected completion date of late July. Derby will be closed during construction except to residential traffic.

NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, detours are unknown or not planned.

Source: Local, county, city and village road officials.

— Compiled by staff writer Jennifer Placinto