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Four killed as storms sweep across South

The Associated Press

Tornadoes plowed across the South from Texas to Alabama on Tuesday and Wednesday, killing four people, wrecking homes and businesses in rural areas and the suburbs of New Orleans, and turning trees to kindling.



A tornado hit VFW Post 9122 in Mendenhall, Miss.

By Rogelio Solis, AP

The violent weather was part of a system that had drenched Texas for four days, pushing rivers out of their banks and forcing people out of their homes.

The thunderstorms moved to the Atlantic Coast and out to sea overnight Wednesday into Thursday, making Thanksgiving a calm, mostly sunny day across the region.

On Wednesday, a line of tornadoes skipped through Alabama early in the day, damaging homes and knocking down trees and power lines across a wide area.

A falling tree killed a woman in a home in Bynum, Ala., about 50 miles east of Birmingham, and a deputy spotted a tornado about the same time.

A tornado that overturned mobile homes and damaged other houses in Autaugaville, Ala., injured several people. "The town itself is small, but the storm concentrated in that area," said Lisa Sulkosky of the Autauga County Emergency Management Agency.

One person was killed in Olla, La., and several homes were "completely torn up" late Tuesday, said LaSalle Parish Sheriff Carl Smith. Olla, with a population of around 1,400, is about 45 miles north of Alexandria.

A twister touched down early Wednesday north of Slidell, La., a suburb of New Orleans, damaging as many as 50 homes and injuring a half-dozen people, said St. Tammany Parish sheriff's spokesman James Hartman. A tornado apparently hit the Jefferson Parish city of Westwego, just south of New Orleans, early Wednesday, tearing off roofs and heavily damaging several businesses, said Police Chief Dwayne Munch.

In Mississippi, a tornado killed one person and injured two outside Louisville, in Winston County. Damage also was reported in scattered communities elsewhere across the state.

The storm destroyed VFW Post 9122 in Simpson County, southeast of Jackson, Miss. Post commander Louis Tanksley said the storm also wiped out 27 acres of trees the post had planned to sell as timber if it ever needed to raise money.

"We may be able to salvage the chairs and tables. Hopefully we can salvage the bingo equipment. We have to have that to stay open. That's how we do our charitable work," Tanksley said.

About a dozen tornadoes struck Texas on Tuesday afternoon and evening. Four of them hit Hardin County, killing a woman and injuring three other people, a sheriff's department dispatcher said.

Authorities believe three other tornadoes hit the town of Kirbyville within minutes of one another, said Billy Ted Smith, emergency management coordinator for Jasper, Newton and Sabine counties. A possible tornado damaged four homes in Wharton County late Tuesday, the National Weather Service said.

Even though skies were clearing in Texas on Wednesday after a rainy week, flood water was moving down some rivers. Officials in Texas' Dewitt County called for the evacuation of about 100 homes near the Guadalupe River, expected to crest Thursday or Friday, said Sheriff Gary Edwards.

About 2,500 people were asked to evacuate homes near the Colorado River in Wharton County. The Colorado was expected to crest late Wednesday at just below the level that floods homes, weather service meteorologist Matt Moreland said.

(Contributing: Jack Williams, USATODAY.com and Associated Press reporter Sophia Mannos in Washington)

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