

Daylight reveals extent of Jefferson City tornado damage

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As daylight began to emerge today, the first glimpses of the damage to Jefferson City from Wednesday night's tornado became clearer. Hours earlier, the fleeting glimpses of destruction in flashlight beams and emergency vehicle lights in the early morning hours suggested a long trail of damage, including to homes, businesses and schools.

The scene on East Dunklin Street just east of Jefferson City Public Schools' central administrative office was of homes missing walls and roofs, fallen tree limbs and power lines blocking the street and power poles snapped and blown over.

People huddled in the open trunk of a van or SUV as rain continued to fall. Other people on a porch wondered when the power might be restored. Drivers weaved down side streets, just trying to find a way through it all.

Police and other emergency vehicles had most east-west streets blocked in the area.

An attempt to go south on U.S. 54 and around the damage only brought the sight of more.

One tractor trailer was blown over into the median of the highway; another nearby looked like it had been shredded.

Damage to Donnie Braun & Sons Auto Repair and Braun Storage, both at 2900 Renns Lake Road just to the west of U.S. 54, appeared to be complete.

The view from the entrance drive to the businesses was of blown-over vehicles and splintered wood — nothing recognizable as a building, at least as far as the flashlight and headlight beams would reach.

As lightning continued to occasionally streak across the night sky, a flashlight-lit walk on Lincoln University's campus seemed to show that many of the campus's buildings were intact, such as Scruggs University Center, Inman E. Page Library and Young Hall.

The schools around Jefferson City High School sustained some damage, though the high school itself did not — at least per the early morning tour of the hallways and roof that JCPS' Superintendent Larry Linthacum, JCPS' director of facilities and transportation Frank Underwood and JCPS' maintenance supervisor John Moon took.

Underwood described the damage that other nearby JCPS buildings did sustain:

- Nichols Career Center had a couple of windows broken, and a gas line had been broken on the roof when large rooftop units had been blown over.
- The roof of the Adkins Stadium press box was blown off.
- Thorpe Gordon Elementary School had minor roof damage.
- Jefferson City Academic Center had minor penetration of its roof by debris.

Underwood added that East Elementary School made it through the storm OK. That school was not listed in an email from JCPS' director of communication Ryan Burns that listed the damaged district buildings.

Simonsen 9th Grade Center appeared to be the largest district building that suffered the most damage — "considerable damage to the roof," according to Burns.

Linthacum shared a photo that showed a large chunk of bricks missing from the southwest corner of Simonsen's roof.

"Upon initial assessment, there may be some minor damage at other buildings, but staff will have to conduct further review later today," Burns wrote.

Wednesday, May 22, was JCPS' last day of school, though summer school is scheduled to start next week.

On the west side of Jefferson City, Thomas Jefferson Middle School was the site of a shelter.

Burns said about 45 people were there, as of about 4 or 4:30 a.m. The Red Cross was in the process of setting up cots for sleeping in the middle school's gym, and staff were working on getting the cafeteria kitchen up and running.

Burns said the school would be available as a shelter during the day today, if need be.

Underwood said First Student school bus service's building on Norman Drive was also open as a shelter.

Lincoln University closed its campus early Thursday morning and, because of the holiday weekend, won't reopen until Tuesday.

University Relations Director Misty Young said school officials were assessing damage on the campus, but the most extensive damage appeared to be at the President's House, 601 Jackson St., which originally was built in 1916 by Hugh and Bessie Stephens, and was bought by Lincoln in 1965.

President Jerald Woolfolk was in the home when the storm hit and, Young reported, "did take shelter in the basement and was not injured."

Young said it's too soon to determine how much damage the storm caused to the home, "but the historic home is uninhabitable at this time."

She said LU's main campus suffered tornado damage "to a few doors and windows," and there was "a great amount of tree limbs and other debris."

Young said work crews were working Thursday to "clear away the smaller limbs and debris," while the larger limbs "will be moved early next week."

Young also said: "The university appreciates the outpouring of concern, and offers for assistance.

"This is a wonderful community and we will get through this tragedy together."