

May 6, 2003 Southern Illinois F4 Tornado

Event Description and Impact:

A supercell developed and moved across Pulaski, Massac, and Pope counties of extreme southern Illinois producing an F4 tornado that resulted in 2 fatalities, 33 injuries and destruction and damage to homes and other property totaling approximately 16 millions dollars.

The first fatality associated with this tornado was in eastern Pulaski along Tick Ridge road. A 53 year old male had taken shelter in his basement with his family when brick from a chimney caved into the basement. Thirteen injuries occurred in Pulaski county.

The second fatality occurred along Boaz Road in western Massac county when a 65 year old female was expelled from her disintegrated mobile home. Twenty injuries occurred in Massac county

Event Analysis:

Analysis of the damage on Wednesday May 7, 2003 by the WFO Paducah MIC and WCM via a CAP provided aerial survey, along with a ground survey conducted by a WFO Paducah storm damage survey team member, indicated potentially greater than F3 damage. As a result, a Quick Response Team (QRT) mobilization was requested through Central Region Headquarters (CRH). This request was complicated by the widespread and extensive magnitude of the early May tornado outbreak and subsequent result in other QRT requests. As a result, the Central Region WCM, Jim Keeney, along with the Paducah WCM, Rick Shanklin, were appointed the tasks of the QRT.

Mr. Keeney arrived in Paducah during the evening of May 7, 2003 and began to assist the local damage assessment team Thursday morning May 8th. Mr. Keeney and Mr. Shanklin conducted a ground survey of the potentially greater than F3 damage in Pulaski and Massac counties on Thursday May 8th. Mr. Keeney and Mr. Shanklin then conducted an aerial survey of this damage during the morning of Friday May 9th.

The assessment team and QRT member were able to complete the field review and assign an F4 rating during the afternoon of Friday May 9th. The ratings were released via a Public Information Statement, and followed up by a Media Advisory that was faxed to all major media in the Paducah CWA before the broadcast of evening news on May 9th. These releases along with numerous pictures were posted on the WFO Paducah web site for this event. Earlier in the week, Public Information Statements were released and posted on the WFO Paducah web site for the other 21 tornadoes and subsequent damage surveys that were conducted.

The F4 tornado was one of 22 tornadoes that struck the Paducah CWA on May 6, 2003. It touched down at 9:32 p.m. CDT just west of Grand Chain, Illinois (Pulaski county) and moved east southeast to along the north bank of the Ohio River before curving northeast. It continued across Massac county passing through Hillerman and the Mermet Lake Conservation Area and then into Pope county where it moved through the Shawnee National Forest and eventually dissipated just north of Golconda near the Ohio River.

Total path length was approximately 33 miles with a maximum width of around 1 mile. The average width was approximately 2/3 of a mile. The maximum Fujita intensity rating was low end F4, both in eastern Pulaski county along Tick Ridge Road and in western Massac county in the Hillerman area.

Description of Tornado:

F-Scale: F4

Path Length: 33 miles

Path Width: 2/3 of a mile

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