

Snowstorm sweeps across nation after hitting Colby

TUSHKA, Okla. (AP) – A massive storm that tore across the country’s midsection left at least seven people dead after smashing uprooted trees into homes in Arkansas and ripping apart the only school in one tiny Oklahoma town.

A tornado swept through Tushka in southeast Oklahoma town late Thursday, killing two sisters in their 70s, Salvation Army Capt. Ric Swartz said.

The tornado also injured at least 25 people as it ground through the town of 350 residents, said Gilbert Wilson, Atoka County emergency management director. He said witnesses reported seeing two tornadoes that merged to form a single twister. The National Weather Service confirmed a single tornado hit the area.

Tushka Public School Principal Matt Simpson said the storm destroyed five school buildings and that the campus is littered with downed trees and bricks blown from the buildings. Students from kindergarten through 12th grade attend the school, which was empty when the storm hit.

Easton Crow, a junior, drove by after the storm and saw missing roofs, crushed vehicles and textbooks scattered everywhere.

“I’m heartbroken. This is where most of us grew up,” Crow, 17, said. “I’m just in awe that in a few seconds, memories that have been built were taken.”

The school won’t reopen for the rest of semester, and officials must figure out where students will attend class, the principal said.

“I’ve been doing this for 10

years, but this is definitely new for me,” Simpson said. “It means a lot of challenges I wasn’t expecting.”

Emergency crews are clearing storm debris from the town’s roads so survivors can return home and officials can assess the damage, Wilson said.

Jim Sarris, 43, returned to his home in Tushka on Friday morning to find the back of his house blown away and debris littering his property. He found his 1986 high school letter jacket a few hundred feet away.

“I had to crawl through (the house) to get a pair of pants,” he said.

An Atoka Trailer Manufacturing plant was destroyed by the storm. The owner, Ryan Eaves, said it would cost millions to rebuild the plant, where some 60 employees

assembled trailers that haul heavy equipment.

“Twenty-four hours ago this was an 80-thousand-square-foot heavy manufacturing facility,” he said. At the moment, it’s a pile of rubble. This building was a shining bright spot for the community. To think it could be overtaken like this is overwhelming.”

He said he would shift work to another factory three miles away.

High winds associated with the same storm system killed five people across Arkansas early Friday.

In Garland County, a 24-year-old man and his 18-month-old daughter were killed when lightning struck a tree, which then fell on their mobile home on Pistol Circle. The victims were crushed

in their bed. As the sun rose Friday, one side of the mobile home was torn away, and the tree still rested on a mattress.

Neighbor Melissa Wright, who lives in a mobile home across the street with her mother and daughter, said her mother was outside and saw the lightning strike.

“I have a 3-year-old girl, and that’s my worst fear,” she said. “You don’t think that when you’re lying in your bed, something like this could happen to you.”

In Bald Knob, a 6-year-old boy was killed when a huge tree fell crushed his home about 2:30 a.m. Police Chief Tim Sanford said the tree was between 6 and 8 feet in diameter and it took more than two hours to get a truck big

enough to lift it so they could reach the child.

“It was a very large, old tree,” Sanford said. “This is very, very tragic.”

Sanford said the boy’s parents and a sibling were rescued with minor injuries. The chief said the tree appeared to have been blown down by straight-line winds.

In eastern Arkansas, strong winds knocked a trailer from its moorings in the little community of Colt, killing a woman inside.

St. Francis County Sheriff Bobby May said a strong downburst of wind apparently got under the double-wide mobile home where Lardelah Anderson, 64, and her husband lived, flipping it onto its roof.

Check cattle prices before setting rent

For those who have not yet negotiated pasture rental rates for this year, Kansas State University agricultural economist Kevin Dhuyvetter points out several factors landowners and stockmen should consider.

Many factors influence the rental rate for any tract of land, including forage quality, stocking rate, size of pasture, water availability and more, but three primary factors explain much of the variation over time, said Dhuyvetter, a farm management specialist with K-State Research and Extension.

“First, rates trend up over time, and so are expected to increase from year to year, all else being equal,” he said. “Second, rates are positively related to cattle prices.... (They) tend to increase more when cattle prices are high compared to when cattle prices are low. Third, rental rates are positively related to corn prices, suggesting that producers will pay more to rent grass when feed prices are high.”

Dhuyvetter and a team of economists built those relationships into a tool that can help landowners and ranchers negotiate. It can be found online at www.agmanager.info/farmmgmt/land/lease/.

This might prove especially handy now that Kansas Agricultural Statistics is no longer publishing its “Bluestem Pasture Release” because of budget issues,

and the agricultural economist said.

This year, Dhuyvetter noted, while rates will vary, various factors suggest an increase in rental rates of 6 to 10 percent from last year.

“The percentage change over the previous 30 years has averaged roughly 1.5 to 2 percent per year, so this suggests pasture rates in 2011 are expected to increase more than average due to this year’s historically high cattle

and corn prices,” Dhuyvetter said. “It is important for landowners to recognize that ... rates also may need to decrease if and when conditions go the other direction.”

If cattle or feed prices change much in the next month or two, ranchers and landowners may want to plug those values into the model to see how the changed values impact projected rental rates, he said.

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- Hamburger and Hotdogs, proceeds to benefit Children’s Miracle Network.
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