

# Tornadoes touch down in Mississippi, Indiana

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Forecasters warned of a “particularly dangerous situation” as a storm system swept across the country on Wednesday, and officials said they feared Christmas yard decorations would become projectiles.

Tornadoes touched down in Mississippi and Indiana, the National Weather Service said. The spring-like storms damaged buildings and knocked down trees, and thousands of people were without power in Indiana and Arkansas.

A tree blew over onto a house in Arkansas, killing an 18-year-old woman and trapping a 1-year-old child inside, authorities said. Rescuers pulled the toddler safely from the home.

In northwest Mississippi, a tornado damaged or destroyed at least 20 homes. Clarksdale Mayor Bill Luckett said the only confirmed casualty was a dog killed by storm debris. Planes at a small airport overturned and an unknown number of people were injured.

“I’m looking at some horrific damage right now,” the mayor said. “Sheet metal is wrapped around trees; there are overturned airplanes; a building is just destroyed.”

Television images showed the tornado appeared to be on the ground for more than 10 minutes. Interstate 55 was closed in both directions as the tornado approached, the Mississippi Highway Patrol said.

After an EF-1 tornado struck the south Indianapolis suburb of Greenwood, television stations showed pictures of damage including a portion of a roof blown off a veterinary office.

The biggest threat for tornadoes was in a region of 3.7 million people in Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas and parts of Missouri, Illinois and Kentucky, according to the national Storm Prediction Center in Oklahoma. The center issued a “particularly dangerous situation” alert for the first time since June 2014, when two massive EF4 twisters devastated a rural Nebraska town, killing two people.

The greatest risk for a few “intense, long-tracked tornadoes” will be through Wednesday night.

About 120 miles east of the tornado, Brandi Holland, a convenience store clerk in Tupelo, Mississippi, said people were reminded of a tornado that damaged or destroyed more than 2,000 homes and businesses in April 2014.

“They’re opening all our tornado shelters because they say there’s an 80 percent chance of a tornado today,” Holland said.

Elsewhere, skiers on the slopes out West got a fresh taste of powder and most people in the Northeast enjoyed spring-like temperatures as



Stephen B. Thornton/Arkansas Democrat-Gazette via AP  
**Construction workers John Croft, left, Michael Edwards, top center, Lee Croft, top right, and Jacob Croft, bottom center, repair damage to the roof of a chicken house, Wednesday along Arkansas 247 north of Atkins, Ark.**



Pope County Sheriff's Department photo via AP  
**This photo provided by the Pope County Sheriff's Department shows a storm damaged home outside of Atkins, Ark., on Dec. 23.**

they finished up last-minute Christmas shopping.

“It’s too warm for me. I don’t like it. I prefer the cold in the winter, in December. Gives you more of that Christmas feel,” said Daniel Flores, a concierge from the Bronx, his light jacket zipped open as he shopped in Manhattan with his three children.

Only about half of the nation, mostly in the West, should expect the possibility of a white Christmas.

In the small coastal town of Loxley, Alabama, Mandy Wilson watched the angry gray sky and told drivers to be careful as she worked a cash register at Love’s Travel Stop.

“It’s very ugly; it’s very scary,” Wilson said. “There’s an 18-wheeler turned over on I-10. There’s water standing really bad. It’s a really inter-

esting way to spend Christmas Eve eve.”

In parts of Georgia, including Atlanta, a flood watch was posted through Friday evening as more than 4 inches was expected, the National Weather Service said.

The threat of severe weather just before Christmas is unusual, but not unprecedented, said Greg Carbin, a meteorologist at the national Storm Prediction Center.

Twisters hit southeast Mississippi exactly a year ago, killing five people and injuring dozens of others. On Christmas Day in 2012, a storm system spawned several tornadoes, damaging homes from Texas to Alabama.

Emergency officials in Tennessee worried that powerful winds could turn holiday yard decorations into projectiles, the same way gusts can fling patio furniture in springtime storms, said Marty Clements, director of the Madison County Emergency Management Agency in Jackson, the state’s largest city between Memphis and Nashville.

“If you go through these neighborhoods, there are a lot of people very proud of what they’ve put out and they’ve got stuff everywhere — all these ornaments and deer and everything else,” Clements said. “They’re not manufactured to withstand that kind of wind speed, so they become almost like little missiles.”

Two tornadoes hit central Louisiana on Monday. The Lake Charles office of the National Weather service said both were EF-1 twisters with peak winds of 95 mph.

Forecasters said by Wednesday night, the severe weather threat could shift east into the southern Appalachian Mountain region.



Gunnar Lindstrom via AP  
**A streak of light is seen over an apartment complex in Las Vegas on Tuesday.**

## Streak of light in Western U.S. sky sends social media abuzz

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The body of a Russian rocket that burned up as it entered the Earth’s atmosphere set off a wave of excitement on social media and fueled speculation over what caused the flash of light to shoot across the sky in the American West.

The fireball seen over Arizona, Nevada and California on Tuesday night was an SL-4 rocket body booster from Russia that launched Monday, U.S. Strategic Command spokeswoman Julie Ziegenhorn said.

U.S. and Russian officials declined to discuss the rocket’s use, but experts outside the government say it was launched as part of a project to bring materials to a space station. They say the rocket’s body likely detached from the craft taking items into space and burned up as it started to go out of orbit.

“It’s not something people need to worry about,” said David Wright, a space-debris expert who is co-director of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

An unmanned Russian cargo ship lifted off Monday from that nation’s space launch complex in Kazakhstan on a journey to the International Space Station. The craft, which carried fuel, water, food and other supplies, has since docked at the station.

People who witnessed the burning light posted photos and video, some speculating that it was a meteor.

Others resorted to humor,

punctuating their comments with a rocket emoji and saying the light across the sky looked Santa’s sleigh. Some people expressed distrust about the U.S. government’s comments on the rocket.

“I was kind of freaked out to see something like that blowing up in the air, and you don’t know what it is,” said Gunnar Lindstrom, who saw the streak of light as he got out of a car at his Las Vegas apartment complex.

He initially thought it was an airplane. Lindstrom, a bartender with a side business as a videographer, said his first instinct was to grab his cellphone camera.

“I was upset I couldn’t grab my real camera,” he said.

Dark skies and few tall mountains make Nevada and northern Arizona a good spot to view the atmosphere at night, said Josh Bangle, a spokesman for the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff.

The same areas got a good view of a U.S. military missile test two weeks ago in New Mexico that produced a white contrail across the sky. Officials shared details about the launch with communities hundreds of miles away to cut down on the speculation.

The debris Tuesday was part of a rocket that’s frequently used in the Russian space program, according to Hannah Thoburn, a research fellow at the Hudson Institute. She said it wasn’t something that should stir concern, but she understands why some people distrust the government’s comments.

### BRIEFLY

#### Several arrests as protest blocks Minneapolis airport access

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Protesters blocked access to a terminal and caused significant holiday traffic delays at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport on Wednesday during a Black Lives Matter rally that also briefly shut down part of the nation’s largest mall.

Access to one of two terminals was closed after more than 100 protesters gathered inside and blocked roads leading to the airport, prompting two security checkpoints to shut down for about 45 minutes, airport spokesman Patrick Hogan said. He said the protest caused some flight delays but no cancellations.

Hoping to draw attention to a recent police shooting of a black man in Minneapolis, protesters took a light-rail train to the airport from the Mall of America, where hundreds of demonstrators initially gathered on one of the year’s busiest shopping days.

“The mall was a decoy,” said Black Lives Matter organizer Miski Noor, who protested at the airport. “I think it was really effective.”

Police said a total of 15 people were arrested at both sites, mostly for trespassing or obstruction of justice. No injuries or property damage were reported.

Gov. Mark Dayton said Wednesday afternoon that the moving protest created a “very, very dangerous situation.”

Dayton questioned the need for such a demonstration, noting that federal and state investigations were ongoing into the death of Jamar Clark, who was fatally shot by Minneapolis police responding to an assault complaint.

#### Afghan troops rushed to area under Taliban attack

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Afghan military has rushed reinforcements to a southern district threatened for days with takeover by the Taliban, the country’s defense minister said Wednesday as he appealed for stepped-up NATO assistance and military support.

In a besieged army base in the embattled district of Sangin, an Afghan soldier described a dire situation, saying a handful of Afghan troops inside were fighting to the last, trying to keep the Taliban out.

Meanwhile, at an air base outside of Kabul, U.S. troops saluted fallen comrades during a memorial ceremony Wednesday for six American soldiers killed in a Taliban attack this week.

The six died when a suicide bomber drove his explosives-laden motorcycle into a joint NATO-Afghan patrol near the Bagram Air Field on Monday. Two U.S. troops and an Afghan were also wounded in that attack — the deadliest day for American troops in Afghanistan since May 2013.

As fighting in the Sangin district of southern Helmand province continued Wednesday, Afghan army and police arrived to help security forces pinned down for days in the besieged area, said the minister, Masoom Stanekzai.

Speaking to reporters in the Afghan capital, Kabul, Stanekzai said that the country’s overstretched security forces need the international military coalition’s help, especially air support, which would help reduce casualties.

Sangin is an important poppy-growing district in Helmand, which borders

Pakistan and sits on transport routes for drugs, arms and other lucrative contraband.

#### Wave of attacks kills at least 15 civilians in Iraq

BAGHDAD (AP) — A wave of attacks across Iraq killed at least 15 civilians on Wednesday as government forces pressed on with their offensive to dislodge Islamic State militants from a major city west of Baghdad, officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, though they bore the hallmarks of the IS, a Sunni militant group that has targeted Iraqi forces, civilians and especially Shiites.

In the Shiite-majority town of Khalis, about 50 miles north of the Iraqi capital, two explosives-laden cars were detonated. The first car was parked inside a bus station and that explosion killed three and wounded 10, a police officer said.

The second car bomb exploded at the town’s outdoor grocery market, killing four civilians and wounding eight.

In and around Baghdad, five bombs went off in commercial areas, killing eight civilians and wounding 35, two police officers said.

Three medical officials confirmed the casualty figures. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to release information.

The attacks came a day after Iraqi security forces reported progress in recapturing some areas in the western city of Ramadi, 80 miles west of Baghdad, from the Islamic State extremists who control large swaths of land in western and northern Iraq and Syria. The IS group has declared a self-styled caliphate on the territory under its control.

## 20th Annual Christmas Spirit Award Presentations

*The Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation is pleased to announce Erick Olson and Mike Snyder as the 2015 Christmas Spirit Award Winners.*



The Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation is pleased to honor **ERICK OLSON** as a recipient of the 20th Annual Christmas Spirit Award. This award is given to one who exemplifies the spirit of Christmas by giving of themselves to others all throughout the year.

Erick is a talented radio broadcaster with a passion for, and affiliation with local sports. But above all, he embodies the Christmas spirit; giving compassion and generosity of time and talents to benefit and serve our local community. These are the hallmarks that make him such a valuable part of our local society.

Erick’s dedication to serving the youth and citizens of our community with his own talents and skills is an immense gift to this area. He selflessly gives of his time and resources without thought of compensation because he believes in the future of this community and a bright future for the youth he serves.

He coaches youth sports programs and sees his role not as merely a coach, but as a role model to those with whom he works. He gives them tools to enable their success not only on the field but also in life as they move through difficult teen years.

Erick spends hours helping high school students write college admissions essays and scholarship applications. He instructs them in the functions of media and broadcasting, volunteers to lecture in collegiate classrooms about oral presentation skills and media literacy, and is committed to various volunteer boards locally.

It is for these reasons that the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, which strives to make our community a better place to live, has selected Erick Olson as a 2015 Christmas Spirit Award recipient.

The Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation is pleased to honor **MIKE SNYDER** as a recipient of the 20th Annual Christmas Spirit Award. This award is given to one who exemplifies the spirit of Christmas by giving of themselves to others all throughout the year.

Mike is an advocate for the underprivileged or disenfranchised people in our community year round. He leverages his skills and resources to benefit the marginalized every single day.

Through collaboration with organizations such as Made to Thrive, Head Start, and CASA, he has built relationships to provide an avenue for generous people in our community to be able to meet the needs of those who would not be known without the relationships he has built.

Mike is an advocate and volunteer at the warming station, helps gather household goods for single parents and their children, and works closely with Made to Thrive to help at-risk youth be involved and participate in sports activities. He helps the homeless by providing work, food and basic needs. He is benevolent within our community and passionate about helping the underserved with whom he comes in contact.

Mike’s empathy and compassion is contagious. One cannot leave his influence without wanting to make the world a better place by following his example.

It is for these reasons that the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, which strives to make our community a better place to live, has selected Mike Snyder as a 2015 Christmas Spirit Award recipient.

The Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation is proud to recognize **Erick Olson** and **Mike Snyder** as the 2015 Christmas Spirit Award winners.

The Foundation mission is to enhance the quality of life and general health of residents living in West Umatilla and Morrow County communities by raising funds and giving to community projects. Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation reviews funding requests and makes awards for worthwhile projects twice a year. The next deadline for submitting grant applications to the Foundation is January 31, 2016.

Groups or individuals interested in making a donation or being considered for funding are encouraged to call the Foundation office at 667-3419.

*Best Wishes For A Happy Holiday Season.*



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