

TROPICAL DEPRESSION CLAUDETTE 8 children in youth van among the 13 lives lost to stormy Southern weather

Girl swept out to sea near Cannon **Beach**

Associated Press

ATLANTA - Eight children in a van from a youth home for abused or neglected children were killed in a fierv multivehicle crash on a wet interstate that also killed a man and his baby in another vehicle, the most devastating blow from a tropical depression that claimed 13 lives in Alabama as it caused flash floods and spurred tornadoes that destroyed dozens of homes.

The crash happened Saturday about 35 miles south of Montgomery on Interstate 65 after vehicles likely hydroplaned on wet roads, said Butler County Coroner Wayne Garlock.

The van, containing children ages 4 to 17, belonged to the Tallapoosa County Girls Ranch, a youth home operated by the Alabama Sheriffs Association. Michael Smith, the youth ranches CEO, said the van was heading back to the ranch near Camp Hill, northeast of Montgomery, after a week at the beach in Gulf Shores. It caught fire after the wreck and Candice Gulley, the ranch director, was the van's only survivor — pulled from the flames by a bystander.

Gulley remained hospitalized Sunday in Montgomery in serious but stable condition. "She's going to survive her physical injuries," Smith said. Two of the dead in the van were Gulley's children, ages 4 and 16. Four others were ranch residents and two were guests, Smith said.

"This is the worst tragedy I've been a part of in my life," said Smith, who drove Sunday to the ranch to talk to the remaining residents, who had returned from Gulf Shores in a separate van and did not see the wreck.

"Words cannot explain what I saw," Smith said of the accident site, which he visited Sat-



Debris covers the street in East Brewton, Alabama, on Saturday. Authorities in Alabama say a suspected tornado spurred by Tropical Storm Claudette demolished or badly damaged at least 50 homes in the small town just north of the Florida border.

urday. "We love these girls like they're our own children."

The crash also claimed the lives of two other people who were in a separate vehicle. Garlock identified them as 29-yearold Cody Fox and his 9-monthold daughter, Ariana, both of Marion County, Tennessee.

'He was a great guy and we're really gonna miss him," said Aaron Sanders, who worked with Fox at the emergency management agency in Marion County. He said Fox also ran a hot tub business with his father and doted on his daughter. "He just loved her to death and that was his life."

Multiple people were also injured.

The National Transportation Safety Board tweeted that it was sending 10 investigators to the area Sunday to investigate the

crash, photos of which showed at least four burned vehicles, including two large trucks. It said the inquiry would focus on vehicle technologies such as forward collision warning systems, fuel tank integrity and occupant survivability.

Meanwhile, a 24-year-old man and a 3-year-old boy were also killed Saturday when a tree fell on their house just outside the Tuscaloosa city limits, said Capt. Jack Kennedy of the Tuscaloosa Violent Crimes Unit. Makayla Ross, a 23-yearold Fort Payne woman, died Saturday after her car ran off the road into a swollen creek, DeKalb County Deputy Coroner Chris Thacker told WHNT-TV.

The deaths occurred as drenching rains from Tropical Depression Claudette pelted

northern Alabama and Georgia late Saturday. As much as 12 inches of rain was reported earlier from Claudette along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Flash flood watches were posted Sunday for eastern Georgia, the southern twothirds of South Carolina and the North Carolina coast. A tropical storm warning was in effect in North Carolina from the Little River Inlet to the town of Duck on the Outer Banks. A tropical storm watch was issued from South Santee River, South Carolina, to the Little River Inlet, forecasters said.

WBRC-TV reported that search efforts were also under way for a man believed to have fallen into the water during flash flooding in Birmingham. Crews were using boats to search Pebble Creek.

Garlock said the location of the multivehicle wreck is "notorious" for hydroplaning, as the northbound highway curves down a hill to a small creek. Traffic on that stretch of I-65 is usually filled with vacationers driving to and from Gulf of Mexico beaches on summer weekends.

Alicia Jossev/via AP

'Butler County has had one of the most terrible traffic accidents," county Sheriff Danny Bond wrote on Facebook.

The Tallapoosa County school system said counselors would be available Sunday at the 225-student Reeltown High School, where some of the ranch residents were students. Smith said the ranch, which is Christian-based, would likely have a memorial service later, asking for prayers as he began to cry.

A fifth grade Portland girl visiting Cannon Beach with her family died last week after she was swept out to sea north of Haystack Rock.

Rescuers, including guardsmen on a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter, found Lily Markwell in the ocean after being called to the scene Thursday. Markwell was brought to shore and airlifted to a hospital but was pronounced dead, according to a GoFundMe page and an announcement from the school Markwell attended.

Markwell attended the ACCESS Academy Alternative Program, which is housed in Vestal Elementary School in Northeast Portland, according to the school's Facebook page. A vigil is planned for 7 p.m. Monday at the school. A GoFundMe page has

been set up to help Markwell's family pay for medical and funeral expenses. More than \$12,500 had been donated as of Sunday afternoon.



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