

Enterprise, Alabama March 1, 2007 Tornado



Photos Courtesy Coffee County Emergency Management Agency

Enterprise, Alabama

- Population of about 24,000
- Neighbors to Fort Rucker, home of Army Aviation
- Home of the Enterprise High School Wildcats
- Home of the Boll Weevil Monument
- 6,100 students in the city

City Preparation

- February 28th – National Weather Service (NWS) warns of approaching severe weather
- Local hospital checks supplies and advises staff to be prepared the next day
- Early on Thursday, March 1st Coffee County EMA holds discussion with school officials

City Preparation

- City schools decided to dismiss school at 1:00 p.m. to allow time for students to return home and buses to return to campus in advance of the afternoon storms

Warnings

- 10:41 a.m. First tornado warning
- 11:27 a.m. Second warning
- 12:10 p.m. Third Warning
- 12:47 p.m. Fourth Warning
- Students and teachers at Hillcrest Elementary and Enterprise High School are sheltering in hallways per school emergency plans

Enterprise Tornado Path



Sighting & Touchdown

- 1:05 p.m. Central Time, approaching from the southwest, the tornado is sighted at the Enterprise Airport
- Four wind shears converge into one mass
- Six major impact areas in City of Enterprise
- At about 1:15 p.m. the tornado touches down at Enterprise High School

Enterprise March 1, 2007



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Powerful Tornado

- 10 mile path through Enterprise
- As much as 500 yards in width
- National Weather Service determines this is an EF-4 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale
- Winds of 170 mph

West College Ave



Residential Damage

- 239 homes destroyed
- 374 homes with “major” damage
- 529 homes with “minor” damage
- 251 homes “affected”

Enterprise High School (EHS)

- Complex of classrooms, auditorium, gymnasiums, band room, athletic facilities, ROTC building and stadium
- Stadium clock blown to neighboring town 14 miles away
- 330 damaged vehicles scattered in five parking lots
- All classrooms are damaged



EHS Aerial Before



EHS After Tornado





Implemented School Plan

- Students and teachers had been moved to areas of safety
- Plan designated church next door as the location to regroup if evacuated
- Roll call was conducted to account for every student
- Crisis Management Kits taken to church to provide first aid to students and staff

Search & Rescue

- Local fire arrived first and established incident command
- Dothan Heavy Rescue called for search & rescue...arrived in 45 minutes, but took 2 hours to get through debris to school
- Army medical helicopters arrived on scene within minutes of tornado with physicians for field triage

Search & Rescue

- Struggled to keep incident command together
- 169 students transported by air, ambulance and private vehicles in first two hours



Problems

- Extensive debris blocked access to scene
- Lost effective communication
 - 2 of 3 VHF repeaters lost
 - Put police, fire and rescue squad on one frequency
- Rescue Squad was unfamiliar with plan that students would be taken to the local church
- Southern Lincs overloaded with high call volume

Medical Center Enterprise

- 131 bed facility
- 117 operational that day
- 10:45 a.m. “Condition Gray”:
 - Moved patients to areas of safety
 - All departments prepared supplies
 - Secured all access points
 - ICS EOC set up in administrative suite

Medical Center Enterprise

- Post tornado touchdown:
 - All staff reported to cafeteria and then to emergency stations
 - Keep staff calm and on task
 - Maintenance and safety check of every department
- Received 77 national and local media calls in 2 hours

Patients Arrive

- Off duty staff walked through blocks of debris to hospital
- Day care set up for staff families
- Physicians came by hospital before moving to the high school to assist
- One hour after touchdown “walking wounded” arrive on foot

Patients Arrive

- Two hours after touchdown ambulances and pick up trucks arrive with wounded
- 64 patients seen in a 12 bed ER suite
 - 2 taken to surgery
 - 10 admitted and 5 transferred

Improvise

- 25 bed surgical suite converted:
 - Minor wound care and sutures
 - Level One and Level Two triage
 - Waiting area for family members of wounded
- Displaced staff families allowed to come to hospital

Improvise

- Security perimeter around hospital set up and manned by hospital staff
 - only family members of wounded allowed inside perimeter

Hospital Staff Well Being

- Established MOU with relief agencies to assist hospital staff:
 - Queried staff as to their needs or staff could self refer
 - Administrative staff visited every area of hospital for several days
 - Counseling provided

Hospital Staff Well Being

- Held “town hall” meetings with administrative staff daily for two weeks
- Staff took care of each other early on

Fatalities & Casualties

- 8 students at Enterprise High School
- Roof of one high school hallway was lifted by the force of the storm, allowing the walls to collapse onto students
- One elderly citizen in a residential area
- About 2,000 injuries
- About 120 students left homeless

President Bush at EHS



Sense of Normalcy

- Students needed to be together
- Local radio advised students to meet on Monday
 - 1,000 students attended
- March 13th
 - meet with all 700 employees of the school system
- March 14th classes resumed in new locations

New Normal

- Hillcrest students have shared the campus of another elementary school – half day schedules
- High school students have shared the Enterprise/Ozark Community College campus, attending classes from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

New Normal

- 36 portable buildings brought in
- Additional burden to bus and maintenance schedules
- Old elementary school being renovated for the high school to use beginning 2009 school year

Mitigation

- “Safe areas” are being retrofitted in local schools and will be a part of new school construction
- Counselors are still available to students, teachers and school staff
- Each classroom now has a Crisis Management Kit

Mitigation

- Priority call privileges on Southern Linc
- Re-working emergency operations plans (EOP) for each responding organization
- Debris removal contracts in place

Resiliency

- Families of students who lost their lives remain an integral part of the community
 - Counselors are still available to them
- The 2007 prom and graduation ceremonies took place as scheduled
- 2007 football games were played in the stadium

Resiliency

- With temporary stadium bleachers and donated lights, the 2007 class graduated where Enterprise High students have “marched” for many years

Rebuilding

- Hillcrest Elementary being rebuilt on original site
 - Will reopen for 2009 school year
- Site preparation for a new high school complex in another part of town have begun
- The new high school is scheduled to open for the 2010 school year

Lessons Learned

- All organizations should adopt NIMS and the Incident Command System (ICS)
- Selection of ICS staff
 - Train ICS Staff
 - Have a Public Information Officer (PIO) speak with “one voice” to the media on behalf of the organization or on behalf of Unified Command

Lessons Learned

- All organizations have a representative at the EOC
- Relationships established and nourished before the tornado were critical
- Memorials are important and traditions are important

Lessons Learned

- Mental health of responders should have been assessed early on
 - 3 crew member resignations at local rescue squad
- Provide a means for staff to learn about what is taking place outside the work place – computers and televisions

Lessons Learned

- Have organization-wide meetings to keep all employees in the loop
- Be sensitive to the fact that future “bad weather” days will cause anxiety

Never Forget

- Remember, but bring closure to the city
- Know you have to move on
- Bumper stickers and magnetic signs adorn cars of Enterprise residents to show their support of students, teachers, grieving parents and the school

Enterprise Contacts

Mayor Kenneth Boswell
City of Enterprise
(334) 347-1211
kboswell@cityofenterprise.net

Chief Sean Gibson
Captain Enterprise Rescue Squad
& Dothan Heavy Rescue
(334) 615-4532
jgibson@dothan.org

Jeff Brannon
President, Medical Center Enterprise
(334) 347-0584
Jeff_brannon@mcehospital.com

Enterprise Contacts

James Reese, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Enterprise City Schools
(334) 347-9531
jimr@enterpriseschools.net
(Contact Dr. Bob Phares through Dr. Reese)

Rick Rainer, Ed.S.
Principal, Enterprise High School
334/347-2640
rrainer@ehs.enterpriseschools.net

John Tallas
Director, Coffee County EMA
334/347-5415
jtallas@co.coffee.al.us