

DAMAGE

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No deaths or serious injuries were reported in Douglas County.

How it began

The National Weather Service and Douglas County Code Red issued a severe thunderstorm warning at 7:01 p.m. Thursday night for Douglas, Pope, Chippewa, Stevens, Swift and Kandiyohi counties.

Accompanied by heavy sheets of rain, the storm in Douglas County toppled decades-old trees, power lines, transformers, boat lifts, sheds and other structures.

One of the hardest hit areas was South Darling Drive NW, where houses were flattened, boats turned over, roofs torn away, a camper tipped over, and vehicles damaged.

A wind gust of 87 mph was reported by a sensor on I-94 near Alexandria, and a wind gust of 72 mph was recorded at the Alexandria airport Thursday night, according to Michelle Margraf, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in the Twin Cities.

Damage to buildings and/or downed trees were reported in Alexandria, Garfield, Osakis and Carlos.

Along Donna Drive, Darling Drive and West Meadow Lane in northwest Alexandria, dozens of trees in soggy soil were uprooted. Many of them toppled into the street.

Home ripped apart

A home at the corner of Donna Drive and West Meadow Lane

BEWARE OF SCAMS IN AFTERMATH OF STORMS

ALEXANDRIA — As residents begin the task of restoring their properties after the storm on Thursday night, May 12, the Alexandria Building Department sent out a warning about storm chaser scams.

“Storm chasers follow storms and come in from all over,” said Lynn Timm, Alexandria building official. “Sometimes they are reputable, and other times they are not. Please do your due diligence when hiring a contractor to do your work. Ask them for verification of their Minnesota Residential Building Contractor license. If they are unable to provide that, walk away. Better yet, we have a lot of great local building contractors who are here for the long run; give them a call.”

Those with any questions may call the building department at 320-763-6678.

Echo Press staff report

was ripped apart. The wind blew away the roof, some siding and collapsed a garage. Trees and debris fell on the vehicles inside. The homeowner, who didn’t want to be identified, said he and his wife were in the basement when the winds picked up around 7:15 p.m. and they were not injured.

The homeowner had just installed new siding and windows a few months ago.

Alexandria firefighters were called to that area and removed a large tree that had toppled onto another house.

Restoring power

Following the storm, Runestone Electric Association had more than 7,000 service accounts without power – about 60% of its service territory. If you are still without power, report it to REA by calling 800-473-1722.

By Sunday evening, only a handful of scattered individual outages remained.

The storm caused damage to transmission and distribution lines across a wide swath of Runestone Electric’s service territory – from Morris to Eagle Bend, and everything in

between, according to the cooperative.

Repairs involved cutting trees from lines, replacing broken poles and splicing broken wires.

Crews from REA, ALP Utilities, Lake Region Electric Cooperative, Stearns Electric Association and Highline Construction worked through the weekend to restore power.

“Although most of the power is restored, cleaning up storm damage will continue,” the REA noted. “We have our work cut out for us! A huge thank you to our members for being patient with us as we worked to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.”

Busy night for law enforcement

Local law enforcement agencies were also busy throughout the storm and its aftermath.

Between 7 p.m. and midnight, the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office, Alexandria Police Department and Osakis Police Department responded to about 40 calls for service related to the storm — trees falling on electric lines, downed power poles, trees blocking roads,



Andrew Lauer / Contributed photo

This overhead drone picture taken by Andrew Lauer of Alexandria shows the widespread damage to an area in northwest Alexandria after a tornado hit shortly after 7 p.m. on Thursday.

sparkling power lines, property damage, semis in the median on I-94, jack-knifed semis, electrical fires, boat lifts blown from a cabin onto a road, and more.

Other damage reports from throughout the county came across the police scanner. Locations impacted by the severe thunderstorms included Glenwood Airport, Swift Falls, Alberta, Garfield, Willmar Airport, Villard, Blomkest, Fish Lake, Milona and Holmes City.

Vehicles blown off Interstate 94

Travel was also affected, with trees blocking roads and streets. Also, shortly before 9 p.m., eastbound Interstate 94 was temporarily closed near Alexandria due to overturned semis from high winds. The lanes reopened at about 10:15 p.m.

Strong wind gusts between 72 and 87 miles per hour blew three vehicles off Interstate 94 in Douglas County.

The crashes happened in the space of 7 minutes.

At 7:10 p.m., Katherine Dell Gruver, 24, of West Fargo was driving east on the freeway near mile post 104, in Hudson Township east of Alexandria when wind gusts blew her 2018 Mitsubishi Outlander into the cables along I-94.

About 4 minutes later, Flores Comancho Eduardo, 53, of Sterling, Illinois, was driving east on the interstate near mile post 101 in LaGrand Township when straight-line winds overturned his 2021 Freightliner semi.

At 7:17 p.m., Juan Anibal Gonzalez, 50, of Cocoa, Florida was driving east when straight-line winds overturned his semi near mile post 92 in Moe Township. The Brandon Fire Department, Douglas County Sheriff’s Office and North Ambulance responded to the scene.

All three drivers were wearing their seat belts, suffered non-life-threatening injuries and were taken by North Memorial Ambulance to Alomere Health in Alexandria, according to the State Patrol.

Alexandria ECHO PRESS

Congratulations, Volunteer of the Year Winner

VICKI BUMP

Vicki has been volunteering at Outreach Food Shelf since 2005 including being a director from 2006-2021. She remains an active volunteer and board member.



Vicki Bump and JR Christensen, Elden’s Fresh Foods

With her ready smile, encouraging words and helpful heart she spreads love and joy with whomever she touches.

She received a \$100 gift card from Elden’s Fresh Foods



Thank you to the five volunteers that were nominated

- Vicki Bump
- Chris Kleven
- Ardis Christensen
- Asheley Nienaber
- Mark Hoff

All proceeds from voting benefit the nonprofits where the nominees volunteer.

SUPPORT

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As of Monday, May 16, the clean-up process was still in full force, but Schroeder said he was amazed by all the support not only he received but everyone in the neighborhood received.

Although he did add that all the onlookers were a little frustrating, especially when there were barricades up to help keep the traffic away. He said he wasn’t sure if an ambulance could have gotten through if there had been a need for one because of the steady stream of vehicles going through. He said the line of traffic started even before the sirens were shut off.

Despite all the people who were there just to check out the damage, Schroeder said it was amazing to see how many were there to show support and help out.

“The show of support was unreal,” he said. “People brought trailers to load up all the junk. At one time, there were probably 20 people in my yard picking up stuff. To get that kind of support

was so cool.”

A friend of his brought over a backhoe and made calls to other people to help out, he said, noting that he himself didn’t have to call anyone and things just got done.

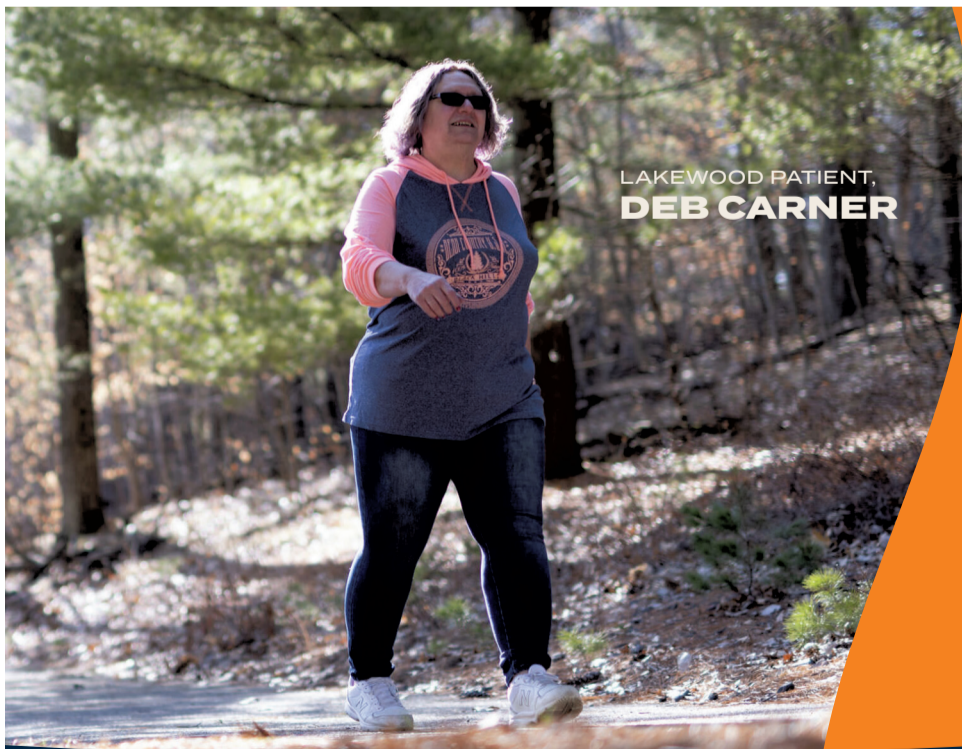
Clean-up efforts in his neighborhood will continue for quite some time, he said, noting that he was grateful for all the help he received.

Putting on his police sergeant hat, Schroeder shared some stern advice: “When you get an alert on your phone or if the sirens start going on, get in your basement immediately.”

Schroeder said the storm that hit his area of Alexandria took all of five seconds. His neighbors, Chris and Sarah Robinson, shared security camera footage with him and within the 48 second clip, the tornado did its damage within a five-second window.

“You don’t have time for anything else but to get in your basement,” Sgt. Schroeder said. “And stay away from areas that have been hit. It’s great to get help, but maybe let the dust settle. And just stay safe.”

Email reporter Celeste Edenloff at cedenloff@echopress.com.



LAKEWOOD PATIENT, DEB CARNER

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