

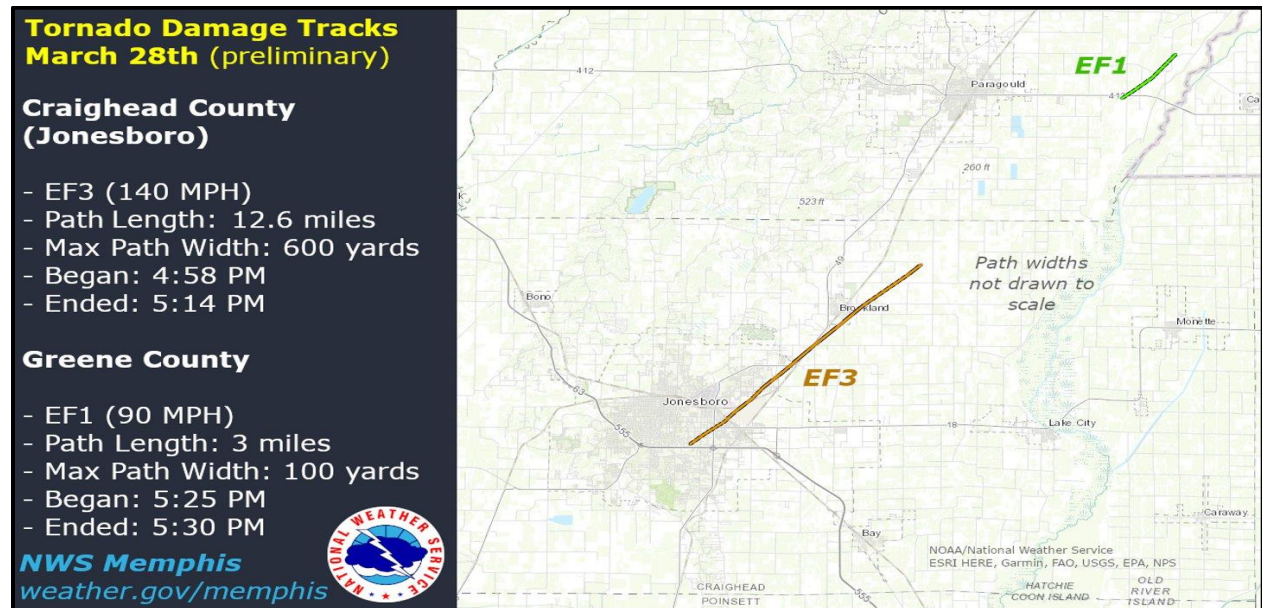
3/28/2020 AFTER ACTION REPORT

Jonesboro Fire Department

Incident Overview:

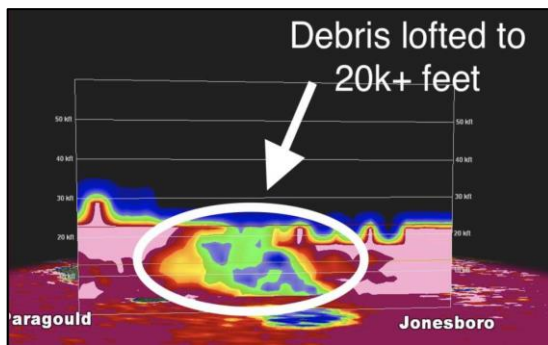
On 3/28/2020, the National Weather Service Memphis office radar indicated a severe thunderstorm capable of producing a tornado near Greenfield, 9 miles southwest of Jonesboro, moving northeast at 40 mph at 4:47 pm. KAIT Weather continued to track this system and warned that this storm could still be capable of producing a tornado. At approximately 4:58 pm' the first reports of a tornado on the ground began to come in. KAIT aired live coverage of the tornado as it went through the city.

According to the National Weather Service, the tornado was classified as an EF3 with max winds of 150 mph. It was on the ground for 16 minutes and traveled 12.6 miles to the northeast. It was 600 yards wide at its biggest point.



It first touched down in the area southeast of Spence Circle moving through the intersection of Caraway Rd. and Race St. As it traveled to the northeast it damaged or destroyed buildings along Caraway Rd, Race St, Fair Park Blvd., Red Wolf Blvd., Parkwood Dr. Highland Dr. East Nettleton Ave., and Airport Rd. It also struck the residential areas from Prospect Farms to Bridger Place. It then moved through the Farville Curve area and continued along Highway 49 N. to Craighead County Road 905 and Three Notch Road ending just southeast of the City of Brookland.

The tornado affected 709 residences in the city, with 149 of those being destroyed. Also, 108 businesses were destroyed or impacted. With major damage to the Mall at Turtle Creek, the Camfil Farr plant and the Jonesboro Municipal Airport. It also caused a Union Pacific Railroad train derailment just north of the Jonesboro Municipal Airport



As a result of the tornado damage there were 3 major events unfolding, Search and Rescue (SAR) operations throughout the city, a large industrial fire at the Camfil Farr plant, and a Union Pacific Railroad train derailment near the Airport RD crossing. The first JFD units were dispatched at 5:04 pm to the Race ST and Caraway RD intersection for reports of people injured. On duty crews began search and rescue operations in this area. At 5:20 pm the emergency call back system was used to recall all members of JFD, 85 off duty members responded, bringing the total to 114 personnel. A command post was set up at the Mall at Turtle Creek. Also, many area Fire Departments sent members and apparatus to support our efforts. At 6:15 pm, Craighead County OEM requested Arkansas Task Force 1 (AR-TF1) to respond to assist with SAR operations. The JFD command post was moved to station 1 at 9:00 pm, by this time JFD personnel had completed a hasty search of the damaged area.

Analysis:

INITIAL RESPONSE

Initially, The JFD's response to this event consisted of on duty personnel. The first JFD units were dispatched at 5:04 pm to the intersection of Race ST and Caraway RD, with reports of people injured and multiple structures with severe damage. The first units on scene began assisting an EMS unit with a patient, then crews began initial search and rescue operations in the area of Spence Cir, Needham St. and Caraway Rd. Multiple other JFD units along with units from Jonesboro Police Dept. (JPD) and EMS responded to Caraway RD and Race ST to begin search and rescue (SAR) operations.

Around 20 minutes into the incident, the JFD emergency call back system was used to recall all off-duty personnel. There was also an "all call" sent to area fire departments to respond to assist, this was not requested by the JFD. There were also lots of "self-dispatched" individuals that showed up to assist. This led to an overwhelming amount of personnel and apparatus showing up while JFD personnel were still trying to completely ascertain the situation that was evolving. A JFD command post along JPD and County OES was set up at the Mall at Turtle Creek.

The driving factor for the JFD's SAR operation was the assumption that there would be many people in the path of the tornado who would be trapped, injured, or killed.

In the initial stages of the operation we didn't know the exact path of the tornado and total extent of damage. We used the calls and reports that came into dispatch as the indicator as where to send assets. This led to many of the structures that were damaged to be searched multiple times by several different agencies.



The call was made by Craighead County Emergency Management to request Arkansas Task Force 1 to assist in SAR operations. The JFD command post was moved to station 1 at 9:00 pm, by this time JFD personnel had completed a hasty search of the damage area. After AR-TF1's arrival, we were able to release all other departments that had come to help. JFD chief officers and AR-TF1 command staff began planning how best to deploy AR-TF1 assets along with JFD personnel to begin secondary searches to the hardest hit areas. The damaged area was laid out on a city map and divided into grids. JFD personnel and AR-TF1 members were split into 6 squads to maximize efficiency. These teams deployed out at approximately 10:30 pm and had searches complete by 3:00 am (3/29). Teams redeployed at 7:00 am (3/29) to begin a final search during daylight hours. This was completed around 10:00 am (3/29) and AR-TF1 was released at 11:15 am.



The outcome of all the SAR operations were negative. In many cases, neighbors were helping neighbors and there were 22 civilian injuries as a result of the storm with 3 of those requiring hospitalization.

The relatively low number of severe injuries and no deaths may be attributed to a few specific factors that help save lives that day.

- The Jonesboro/Craighead County Dispatch Center activated the “tornado sirens” through the city.
- During this time, local TV and Radio was providing wall-to-wall coverage of the storm, including their weather cameras showing live coverage of the tornado on the ground.
- Because of the COVID-19 guidelines that were in place, a lot of the business that would have normally been opened on a Saturday afternoon (The Mall at Turtle Creek) were closed.

The fire at the Camfil Farr Company presented a challenge because we already had units committed to SAR operations. Due to the damage that the building had sustained, access to the seat of the fire was very hard to obtain. Also, there was a major natural gas leak at the plant. CenterPoint advised that they would have to dig up the main line and clamp it off to stop the flow of gas due to the amount of damage caused after a wall collapsed and fell on to the piping. We used off duty personnel and aid from Philadelphia VFD and Harrisburg FD to help bring this fire under control.

The train derailment of a Union Pacific Rail Road train took a short time to access. After speaking to the UPRR personnel on board, it was determined that 35 rail cars had been overturned along the track, (3) 275 gallon totes of a flammable liquid (UN # 1993) were on board and did have a small leak. There wasn't a high hazard involved with the leak, so the decision was made to allow UPRR personnel to take care of this problem.



Recommendations:

1. Jonesboro Fire Department be the lead agency for search and rescue operations in the city
2. Unified Command utilized early in the incident; utilize ICS
3. JFD Chief Officers staff command functions
4. Train on wide area search procedures
5. Train Chief Officers on the call back system
6. Set up staging areas away from the hazard area
7. Equip a City of Jonesboro mobile command unit so we don't have to rely on outside agencies
8. Need updated equipment for COMM 1
9. Access to ICS forms and city maps
10. Staff units to maintain a "presence" in the hardest hit neighborhoods after SAR is complete.
11. As personnel respond to the call back system, stage at their assigned station and await instruction from their immediate supervisor.