

**JONESBORO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
TORNADO RESPONSE  
AFTER ACTION REPORT  
MARCH 28, 2020**





On March 28, 2020 at approximately 4:45pm, a sizable tornado touched down in the city of Jonesboro causing extensive damage. The tornado initially touched down in South central Jonesboro, quickly intensified and caused damage to homes and businesses consistent with an EF -2 rated tornado (wind speeds between 115 and 135 mph). The peak intensity of this storm occurred as it crossed over the Jonesboro Airport where damage occurred consistent with an EF -3 tornado (wind speeds between 136 and 165 mph). Industrial buildings were heavily damaged, including damage from a train derailment and a large fire at one industrial business. The path went through several residential areas where EF-2 and EF-3 damage was noted. The tornado traveled a total of 12.55 miles and finally lifted to the northeast of Jonesboro, in northeast Brookland. The National Weather Service estimated the tornado to be 600 yards in width with a peak wind speed of 150 MPH. Twenty-two people were reported to have been injured, with none of those injured being life threatening.

Thanks to local news and weathercasters, citizens were given adequate notice and instruction to get into their “safe spots” and take cover from the approaching tornado. Additionally, in response to the national COVID-19 pandemic, very few residents or visitors were out in public and many businesses, including most of those located in the Mall at Turtle Creek, were closed. With more residents at home, they were afforded quick access to a location safe from the storm, greatly lowering the risk of injury.

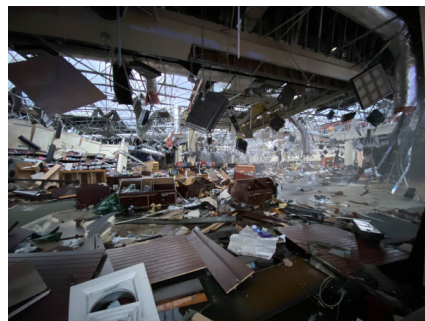


The primary concern for the Jonesboro Police Department in response to the tornado was the protection of life and property, the enforcement of criminal laws, to maintain order and coordinate and assist in the movement of people and resources in and around the affected area. Supervisors on duty immediately set up a Command Post at the Mall at Turtle Creek. This post offered a centralized location for all

responding agencies with ample space to handle the large number of first responders and volunteers that arrived on scene within the hour. At the time the tornado struck, there were 19 officers on duty, including supervisors. Within an hour, 158 officers, including the entire command staff, were on duty. Ten reserves also reported on duty, as well as five civilian employees.

Additionally, volunteers from over 25 area law enforcement agencies and other first responders reported to the Command Post. This significant response from off-duty officers negated the need for a call-out, as most were already on scene. Fire Department personnel, JPD officers and many other volunteers who responded checked and re-checked affected businesses and residences. Reports of injuries were very few and information regarding initial damage assessments and road issues was effectively reported back to Command in order to enable decisions regarding deployment of needed resources to the most vital areas. After the initial Search and Rescue response, officers faced four basic duty assignments; maintaining efficient traffic flow, manning check points, patrolling affected areas, and answering calls for service.

At approximately 10:00pm on March 28, the Chief of Police implemented the “All Hazards Plan” which transitioned the department to on-going 12-hour shifts with all officers assigned to work either day shift or night shift. Several first line supervisors coordinated the implementation of 12 hourshifts and adjusted for needed personnel. Disaster areas were divided into zones and officers were assigned to each zone to control access to neighborhoods as well as provide 24-hour general patrol within each zone. Due to deployment to specific areas, officers were able to deter looting and limit the need to make arrests. This plan stayed in place until 7:00am on April 2 at which time the Chief issued all shifts to return to normal work schedules.



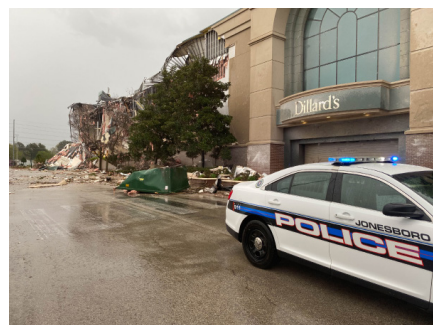


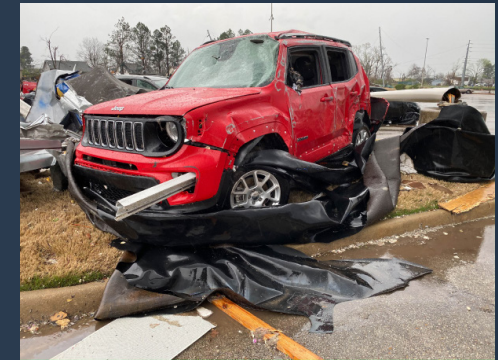
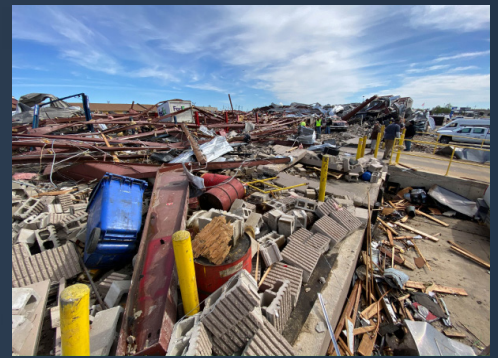
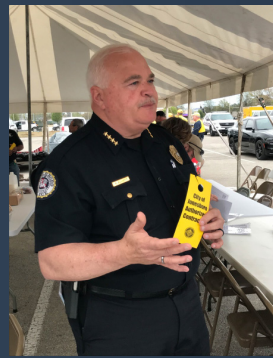
Perhaps due to our rapid deployment and ready availability, functions not normally associated with law enforcement efforts were thrust upon the police department such as coordination of civilian volunteers, and directing equipment for clean-up efforts. Those cleanup efforts included the response from railroad authorities to the derailment and overturning of a 55 car train from the Union Pacific Railroad near the Jonesboro Municipal Airport. Within an hour or two of the initial response, officers shifted focus as they were tasked with attempting to keep traffic flowing as volunteers, city and county road crews and code enforcement personnel attempted to clear debris from roadways and drives and residents sought to retrieve belongings. During the next several days, officers remained on duty in the affected areas in order to provide security to the residents and businesses, as well as assist in traffic matters as trucks removed debris and other material and repair crews from CWL and other contractors began repairs. JPD was also later tasked with enforcing an imposed curfew.



In the ensuing days, the Code Enforcement Department, City Inspectors Office and City Sanitation Department, worked tirelessly to coordinate and carry out clean-up work and ensure that the work of reoccupying and rebuilding of structures was being conducted correctly and within city guidelines. All of those entities also worked alongside the Craighead County Judge's Office, Craighead County Office of Emergency Management, the American Red Cross, and the Jonesboro Chamber of Commerce to come up with a final tally of businesses and homes affected. Ultimately, the tornado damaged or destroyed 63 businesses within the Mall at Turtle Creek, 3 businesses at the Jonesboro Municipal Airport, and 42 standalone businesses. In addition, 149 homes were destroyed, 114 homes and 8 apartments were deemed unoccupiable with major damage, and 446 homes were found to be occupiable with minor damage. Preliminary cleanup estimates total over \$500 million.

This review is intended to serve as a brief summary of actions related primarily to the Jonesboro Police Department following the tornado on March 28, 2020. As only one unit among the City of Jonesboro government, obviously, many other people and entities played vital roles. Overall man-hours incurred by police department personnel alone tallied to well over 12,000 hours, with approximately 8,500 of those incurred with personnel directed solely to tornado duty for an entire shift. The experiences gained during this event has provided better perspective for future events. Among the lessons learned was the need for additional training and designation of pre-assigned roles as defined in the Incident Command System and moving forward, the Jonesboro Police Department will facilitate training on the Incident Command Structure for all supervisors. The strength of our community was on full display with an incredible outpouring of support from the community in providing labor, resources, supplies and food. The Department also gained valuable insight and understanding of how interaction and cooperation among different entities, not just within the city, but also among county, state and volunteer organizations, can be further developed.





## Special Thanks to the following agencies and organizations for their rapid response in rendering mutual aid:

Arkansas State Police, Paragould Police Department, Trumann Police Department, Wynne Police Department, Arkansas Highway Police, Pocahontas Police Department, Craighead County Sheriff's Office, Bay Police Department, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Greene County Sheriff's Office, Marked Tree Police Department, Arkansas State University Police Department, Hoxie Police Department, Harrisburg Police Department, Monette Police Department, Lawrence County Sheriff's Office, Jackson County Sheriff's Office, Lepanto Police Department, Randolph County Sheriff's Office, Arkansas Community Corrections, Poinsett County Sheriff's Office, Greene County Rescue Squad, Cash Police Department, the Arkansas Department of Transportation, Homeland Security Investigations, the US Marshals, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Samaritan's Purse, and many more.

