

TORNADO TEARS UP PROPERTIES NEAR COAST

Tallahassee Democrat – October 29 2006
Written By Daniela Velazquez

Power was expected to return today to homes and businesses in Apalachicola after a tornado Friday that hit a substation and several distribution and transmission lines, said Tanya Evans of Progress Energy.

As of Saturday night, about 1,600 homes and other structures were without power, which is all of the electric meters in the town.

Parts of the area had significant damage, said Chris Floyd of the Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross. Four families' homes were destroyed, nine others have major damage and 26 have minor damage, he said.

The tornado knocked some of the windows out at the George Weems Hospital and damaged the roof of a Burger King.

"It was a lot worse than Hurricane Dennis," Apalachicola resident Avril Proctor said. "Huge oak trees were falling; roofs were taken off."

Proctor was in Tallahassee when the tornado hit, but went at about midnight to pick up her daughter and saw the destruction. "It did a lot more damage than people realize," she said.

Hospital laboratory windows were blown out by the storm, said Franklin County Sheriff Mike Mock.

"We don't think the damage to the equipment is too bad," he said. "It could have been much worse."

Several thousand trees were uprooted or had their tops sheared off, said Mike Jamski of the National Weather Service.

The Red Cross had 27 of its volunteers working in the coastal town over the weekend. In addition to providing financial help for those families affected, the organization will continue to feed the emergency workers through the weekend. The Red Cross had served 136 meals and 397 snacks by Saturday afternoon.

The storm hit at about 6:10 p.m. Friday and lasted for about five minutes, Jamski said.

"It was a water spout that came ashore on Highway 98 around 26th Street, moved northeast and went through the center of Apalachicola before lifting," he said.

The tornado had a mile-long path and a 100-yard width. The NWS determined the storm was a tornado after the water spout moved on shore but has not determined where the storm falls on the five-point scale used to determine its strength.

"F-1 is more structural damage. That's possibly what we're seeing here," Jamski said, referring to Burger King's roof.

He said they probably won't make a determination until next week after they do some more surveys. An F-0 tornado has winds of less than 73 mph, while an F-1 has winds of 73 to 112 mph.