

Officials say 60 injured;

By Jeff Smithpeters
Siftings Herald

A tornado cut a 20-mile path across Clark County Saturday afternoon leaving at least four people dead and 60 injured.

Officials said they would release the identities of those killed some time today.

The tornado was spotted at about 2:15 p.m. southwest of Arkadelphia.

It blew cars off of the interstate near the 68 milemarker, killing the driver of one vehicle. It also blew a tractor-trailer rig on its side.

The twister continued northeast, destroying Honkey's Truck Stop at the Gum Springs exit. No one was injured in the building.

A residential area south of Walnut Street along 12th Street was then leveled by the storm, killing at least one person.

The tornado left a path of destruction through downtown Arkadelphia where many businesses and more homes were destroyed.

Riverwood Nursing Home was the last structure in the tornado's path before it left the area.

Every available emergency worker was summoned to the scenes of destruction. Crews from surrounding counties arrived to assist in rescue and cleanup efforts.

They were assisted by many volunteers.

At least 50 ambulances and other rescue vehicles had arrived in Arkadelphia by 9 p.m.

Rescue personnel were still searching destroyed buildings late Saturday night. Several people were still reported missing.

Clark County Emergency Services Coordinator Jim Burns said he was near Southfork Truckstop when the tornado touched down. He was sitting in his utility vehicle watching the clouds when trees fell around him, pinning him in. He had to call for loggers from International

Paper to cut him out.

While Burns sat in his vehicle, he called the Clark County Sheriff's Office and instructed them to sound the tornado sirens in Arkadelphia and Caddo Valley.

Many local landmarks were destroyed. Deaton's Barber Shop, Wells Shoe Store, Shaw's Garden and Tea Room, Spark's Auto Center, Andrew Berry's Accounting firm, the Arkansas Revenue Office, Pioneer Abstract and Title Company, the Nazarene Church, and Williams Saw Company were among the many businesses leveled by the tornado.

A woman was reportedly killed in Berry's Accounting Office.

A fourth person is known to have died from natural causes.

Murry-Ruggles Funeral Home, All-Care Pharmacy and offices, Conine's Coast to Coast, Elk Horn Bank, Citizens First Bank and Arkadelphia Custom Carpets all suffered extensive damage.

In addition, winds blew apart the recently refurbished clock tower of the Clark County Courthouse and did considerable damage to the exterior of the historical building, one day after bids from contractors were opened to renovate it.

Electricity was lost throughout the city about five minutes before the storm hit, and remained off in the eastern part of town into the night.

A temporary command post was set up at the parking lot of the Western Sizzlin. It was later moved to the Senior Adult Center, where agencies from throughout the southwest region of the state converged. Arkadelphia police and other law enforcement officers stood guard around damaged sites to prevent looting. Later, a contingent of National Guardsman from Arkadelphia returned

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from training exercises at Camp Robinson and further secured the area, enforcing a dusk to dawn curfew.

Rescue personnel from throughout the region went about the task of sifting through debris and checking damaged homes for the injured or dead.

At about 6 p.m., word came from the office of Governor Mike Huckabee that the county had been declared a disaster area. Personnel from the state Red Cross office headed toward Arkadelphia to dispense food and assist victims, many of whom were

either homeless or injured.

Burns said he expected Arkadelphia and Clark County would also be declared a federal disaster area, which would entitle people affected by the disaster to quick loans and financial assistance.

Police Chief Bob Johnston cautioned people to stay indoors as much as possible Sunday while cleanup continues. "Stay at home if they have one, if they don't go visit somebody," he said. "We're not going to tolerate looting around and gawking for obvious reasons."