

Kenny Howell

Managing Editor

An EF-2 tornado touched down and did major damage on the north side of town early Wednesday morning.

The tornado packed winds of up to 115 miles per hour, and covered a path of nearly five miles. It touched down near Glenwood Dr. and ended at Cook's Church Road.

Commissioner Ray Justice's district saw most of the damage. He had been out driving around all morning, and been helping out where he could. He said that saw many in the community stepping up to help, including the businesses in the Publix shopping center at the corner of North Mt. Juliet Road and Lebanon Road. They provided food and opened up their facilities to the police department and other workers trying to help clean up the area.

"It's what I would expect from Mt. Juliet," said Justice.

The Publix shopping center down to the Mt. Juliet League fields were heavily damaged. The Mt. Juliet League suffered an estimated \$200,000 worth of damage. Justice said he will bring up

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something to the commission for some emergency funding to get them up and going. Tryouts were supposed to start Saturday. They held a clean-up day instead.

The Dollar General on Lebanon Road was also severely damaged. The west side wall collapsed and much of the roof was blown off. Subway's store front was blown out and a gas leak caused a fire. Several business' signs were destroyed.

The Lineberry office building a little further down Lebanon Road had the entire third floor destroyed. Three people were on that top floor, but hid under a mattress for safety and all survived.

An 18-wheeler was turned over near Hardee's on Lineberry Boulevard. The driver was inside, but was unharmed.

City Manager Kenny Martin said he had been working since 3:30 a.m. as well as the Mt. Juliet Police Department.

"I can't say enough about the Mt. Juliet Police Department," said Martin. Justice echoed those comments.

Martin said that there was a lot of uncertainty this morning because it was pitch black after the tornado passed. There were live downed power lines, gas leaks and many other dangers that they couldn't fully access because of the lack of light.

Martin said he contacted Deputy Director of Schools Mickey Hall a little after 4 a.m. to request that schools in the area be closed, or at least delayed until they could further get the situation under control. Martin said in the 23 years he has been with the City part of it as Police Chief, he had never made that request, so he didn't take it lightly. Martin said he received word back that the request had been denied. In the school board meeting Monday, Director of Schools Mike Davis said he only received a text from Martin, and didn't get to read it until later.

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“It would have been best if they just would have stayed put,” said Martin of the students. He said that he had all the respect in the world for Davis, and knows they know their business better than he does, but he would have hoped they would have at least delayed opening.

Before 6:15 a.m., Davis received word that Mt. Juliet Elementary and West Elementary didn't have power, so he sent out a message that those schools would be closed for the day. He didn't know at the time that W.A. Wright Elementary didn't have power, but when he found that out later, he decided to close the school at around 6:45. The buses had already run their routes and were starting to arrive at the school. Many parents were already dropping their kids off as well, and had to come back and get them because they didn't realize they were closed.

“In hindsight, we probably should have used a delayed schedule,” said Davis about the situation.

Justice, who has a child in the school, was upset about the confusion.

“I'm furious about the situation,” said Justice. “That was a horrible decision by Dr. Davis.”

Davis said that he felt that it would be good for some students to be at school who didn't have power at home because they could get a warm meal, and be in a building with heat since temperatures were dropping Wednesday. He also said there are many factors that go into the decision to close schools for a day.

Martin was optimistic that the city would be up and running as normal in no time. Most of the businesses affected were back open Thursday.

“We have a wonderful community. We'll get there.”

Many were concerned because they didn't hear the WEMA outdoor sirens go off during the storm.

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Wilson County Weather Operations sent out a notice after the tornado that the outdoor sirens are not designed to be heard in your home. They are to warn people outside. The sirens were tested Saturday and worked properly.

Some sirens can be heard on a clear day, and even during a storm, but when you factor in high winds, it can alter or distort sound waves.