

'Trail of destruction' as tornadoes, storms in 3 states kill at least 32: Live updates

At least 32 people were killed in Kentucky, Missouri and Virginia after [storms and tornadoes tore through the region](#) as part of an extreme weather outbreak on May 16, "leaving behind a trail of destruction," authorities said.

The toll includes at least 23 dead in Kentucky and seven in Missouri, authorities there said. The number of fatalities was expected to continue increasing, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said.

The Kentucky deaths were concentrated in Laurel County in the southeastern part of the state, where a tornado tore through the city of London. A Laurel County firefighter died while responding. Randall Weddle, mayor of the city of London, told the [Louisville Courier Journal](#), part of the USA TODAY Network, that at least 23 people there died. Beshear confirmed at least 18 deaths: 17 in Laurel County and one in Pulaski County. The youngest victim is a 25-year-old Laurel County man.

Beshear said during a 5 p.m. press conference on May 17 that he expected the Kentucky death toll to "potentially rise."

"This was a devastatingly strong tornado that tore through a subdivision in the middle of the night and that is the worst type of natural disaster," he said.

The tornadoes came amid a severe weather outbreak with preliminary reports of tornadoes in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and even New Jersey.

The [tornado that struck the south end of Laurel County](#) leveled more than a dozen houses to their foundations in the Westland neighborhood and left the streets full of brick, wood and personal belongings, the Courier Journal reported.

"I've never felt the ground vibrate so hard," said Keith Clark, whose family huddled in a closet during the storm. "It was really bad. Then hearing neighbors scream and you can't get to them, it's pretty scary."

St. Louis tornado: Up to a mile wide, maximum winds 150 mph

The National Weather Service St. Louis released preliminary information on the May 16 twister that killed five people in the city and injured at least 38.

The tornado was an EF3 with winds of 150 mph, according to a NWS [social media post](#). Its path was at least eight miles long and up to a mile wide. It began in the city of Clayton at 2:41 p.m. Central.

Roads closed, homes damaged

Destruction to buildings and roadways has been widespread, officials said.

Eric Gibson, who heads Kentucky's Emergency Management department, said hundreds of homes have been damaged in the state.

Parts of 24 state highways were closed May 17 because of the disaster, Beshear said.

The Laurel County Sheriff's Office, London Police Department and Kentucky State Police answered more than 4,000 calls for service related to the disaster, the governor said.

Nearly 70,000 without power in Kentucky

Beshear said 69,218 people remain without power statewide.

That's down from a high of 172,711 power outages in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.



Beshear, a Democrat, said he spoke with federal emergency officials about disaster recovery and is working with President [Donald Trump](#)'s administration.

"Politics has no place in responding to national disasters like this one, and for the two events that we've already had this year, we've seen a White House and a FEMA organization that has performed well and has done what we've asked," he said.

Kentucky victims range in age from 76 to 25

Beshear listed the sex and age of those who died in the Kentucky storms. The oldest is a 76-year-old man, the youngest a 25-year-old man, both from Laurel County, a community of 63,000 people south of Lexington in the Appalachian region.

The tornado also killed a 48-year-old and a 51-year-old woman from Laurel County. Beshear didn't know the ages of three other individuals who died. The other confirmed fatalities are individuals in their 60s and 70s.

At least 10 people are in critical condition and others are receiving medical care, Beshear said.

"All our efforts are still focused on searching and rescuing anyone who might still be in danger," the governor said. "And tending to those who are still fighting for their lives."

Kentucky tornado had powerful winds, possibly up to 165 mph

Beshear said he was awaiting more information on the strength of the Kentucky tornado.

The information he received from the National Weather Service, which he said was relayed to him "secondhand," is that the tornado was an EF3 when it went through the Somerset community.

An EF3 tornado has winds of 136 to 165 mph.



'A roar like I've never heard before'

Sharon Deaton ran up the stairs of her home in Laurel County to grab a candle.

"When I get to the top of the stairs, the roar was unreal," Deaton said, recalling a reported tornado that struck the area Friday. "Then, there it was."

She and her family huddled against a wall in a small portion of the family room that's underground.

"We covered our heads up and prayed really hard," she said. "Everyone says it sounds like a freight train, but to me it was a roar like I've never heard before."



The family began to hear glass and window panes breaking.

When it passed, Deaton looked around, saw her family was safe, and I said, 'There is nothing in this house that I can't leave behind.'"

When the family tried to leave, though, they found they were trapped because they couldn't get through the garage door or the back door.

As she was rushed by other family members to vehicles and taken to safety, she couldn't see the neighborhood she'd lived in since the 80s.

Then she returned to it during the daylight of Saturday morning.

"It broke my heart," Deaton said as she stifled a sob.

She loved this neighborhood by the London-Corbin airport, loved the quiet street where she walked her dog.

Now, her clothes were being stacked in the back of an SUV and several cars sat in her front lawn.

"We don't even know whose those are," she said.

Deaton placed her hands over her mouth as she looked across the hills of trees reaching toward the sky with no leaves and houses exposed to their beams.

"I'm just believing that, yes it's changed, but I know a God that restores, so that's where we're at," she said.

-Louisville Courier Journal

Firefighter dies responding to tornado

Major Roger Leslie Leatherman died after being fatally injured while responding to a reported tornado in Kentucky, the Laurel County Fire Department shared in a social media post.

The department said Leatherman "was a dedicated public servant for 39 years, answering the call to protect and help others in their most critical time of need."

"Please keep Major Leatherman's family, friends, and fellow responders in your thoughts and prayers," the post said.

-Louisville Courier Journal

Laurel County residents, injured in storm, return to destruction

Tammie Warren crouched on the debris that used to be her home, calling out for her nearly 2-year-old gray miniature schnauzer, named after country

music legend Willie Nelson. The wind blew through [Laurel County](#), rustling siding and spraying water from broken water pipes in a house next door.

“Willie,” she called out. “Come on, baby, let’s go for a ride.”

“Willie, do you want a treat?” she called again.



When her phone alerted her to a tornado the night before, she ran to her front windows to see neighbors hopping in their trucks to leave. As she ran to a utility door, she couldn’t get it open. Then, a rush of air blew the door open, threw her to the ground and dropped her hot water heater on her left leg.

“It must have been adrenaline, but I pulled my leg out,” she said. “I was under that granite slab right there. I crawled out and sat on that slab for probably 45 minutes until the fire department was able to come rescue me.”



Warren's husband was found in the kitchen, a cut to his neck. He was taken to a hospital in Lexington. And her son, blood still leaking from wounds to his legs and wearing a hospital band, walked dazed through the property shouting for Willie.

“Jesus, let me find him,” Warren said, as she tried to step through the debris and saw nails sticking up near her foot. She stopped and began to cry. “Please, Jesus, let me find him.”

Stephanie Mink stood at an intersection of two unidentifiable roads that no longer had street signs.

“How do we find out what happened to the people in this home?” she asked. She was looking for family. As she relayed her phone number, her voice began to tremble.

-Louisville Courier Journal

2 dead in Virginia storms

Severe weather in Virginia led to at least two deaths, authorities said on May 16.

In Fairfax County, a woman was killed in her car after a tree fell on it, police said.

Another driver was killed at about 6 p.m. when a tree fell on a vehicle along the George Washington Memorial Parkway near Morningside Lane, in Fort Hunt, Virginia, the U.S. Park Police said in an email to USA TODAY.

Tornado one of worst storms in St. Louis history, mayor says

The catastrophic tornado is believed to be one of the worst storms in the history of St. Louis, Mayor Spencer said in a May 17 news conference. Spencer said in addition to the five killed in the city, at least 38 people were injured. About 5,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed in the storm, she said. Sirens could be heard in the distance as Spencer and Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe gave updates.

The tornado downed trees and ripped entire walls off of homes, as photos of the destruction showed.

"The devastation is truly tremendous," Spencer said.

St. Louis resident Joan Miller said she narrowly escaped when the tornado struck her brick house.



"The wind started, the tree out front was shaking so violently," Miller said. "And suddenly all the doors shut, the windows flew out from the bedroom ... the entire back of my house ... you can see straight into the alley now."

About 130 miles away in Scott County, Missouri, the sheriff's office said two more were killed in a tornado that tore through rural areas there.

"The tornado moved from the eastern part of the county, leaving behind a trail of destruction, with multiple homes completely lost and areas left unrecognizable," Sheriff Derick Wheatley said in a [statement](#).

One of the people killed during the storm was in a car at the time, St. Louis Police Chief Robert Tracy said. Authorities didn't give additional details about the circumstances of the deaths or injuries.

The death toll in St. Louis did not increase as search and rescue crews combed through the debris overnight, which is good news, Spencer said. The teams worked through about 2:30 a.m. to go door-to-door, said Fire Chief Dennis Jenkerson. They searched about 4,000 homes and plan to continue searching and repeating searches.

"We've got a lot of work left to do," Jenkerson said. "We won't leave any stone unturned."

Tornadoes kill at least 23, injure more in Kentucky

[Authorities in Kentucky expect the death toll to increase as they continue to search the ravaged areas](#). In Laurel County, the toll rose from nine earlier on May 17 to 23. The tornado there hit just before midnight on May 16, the sheriff's office said. Many more were injured.

Four were injured in Louisville when a tree collapsed "across the center" of a home. The injured included two adults and two children who were trapped in the house before being rescued, the fire department said, according to the Louisville Courier Journal, part of the USA TODAY Network.

The National Weather Service reported possible tornadoes in Pulaski and Laurel counties in southeastern Kentucky. According to [a May 16 storm report](#), a trained spotter reported a tornado in Somerset, while "likely tornado damage" was shown at the London-Corbin Airport.

A relief station was set up at South Laurel High School gym, according to [Laurel County Clerk Tony Brown](#). The station has supplies for victims of the tornado, as well as food for victims and first responders.

London Mayor Randall Weddle said people came out overnight with chainsaws and other tools to help.

"It's just been amazing to watch all the moving parts here in our city and our county," Weddle said. "Right now, they're still searching for people through all this debris."

-Bailey Loosemore, Stephanie Kuzydym and Hannah Pinski, the Louisville Courier Journal

Post office destroyed after storms hit in Indiana

Tornadoes touched down in Bloomington, Greene County, Brown County and elsewhere across Indiana on May 16, [according to the Herald-Times](#), part of the USA TODAY Network. A video on social media showed softball-sized hail in Greene County.

Ashley Byarlay was driving home at 7:30 p.m. when she watched a tornado form over a housing subdivision in Bloomington, Indiana.



"My dream job was to be a storm chaser," she said, "so I got to live my dream job today."

She said she watched the tornado touch down near South Rogers and That Road and then lift up and travel farther east before dropping down again.

The Clear Creek Post Office was destroyed along with several other buildings. Transformers and power lines were lying in the street as people came out from their homes and drove by in cars to see the damage.

-Carol Kugler, The Herald-Times

50 million people affected by severe storms from Texas to New York over the weekend, forecasters say

Severe storms over the weekend are expected to stretch from Texas and Georgia up to New York, according to AccuWeather. Approximately 50 million people are at risk of tornadoes and thunderstorms over vast swaths of the country on May 17 and 18, the forecasting company reported.



Beginning the afternoon of May 17, AccuWeather reported a high risk of isolated tornadoes, large hail and flooding in the southern U.S., particularly in and around Dallas. On May 18, tornadoes, large hail and downpours are projected to hit parts of Kansas and Oklahoma.

In the Northeast, residents can expect flooding downpours and wind gusts upwards of 50 mph starting the evening of May 17.

Forecasters project severe weather continuing early next week in the central United States across the Plains and Mississippi Valley.

- Eduardo Cuevas

Power outages across several states after storms

Crews worked to slowly restore power to the tens of thousands in the dark on May 17 after storms hit across the central part of the United States the day before, according to USA TODAY's power outage [tracker](#).

There were about 73,000 Kentucky homes and businesses without power, down from the more than 100,000 reported earlier in the morning by [Beshear](#). Five counties had also reported states of emergencies.

In Missouri, about 78,000 customers were in the dark. Of those, nearly 40,000 were in St. Louis where a deadly tornado caused destruction.

Another large cluster of power outages was impacting customers in Michigan after severe storms on the nights of May 15 and 16. About 135,000

homes and businesses were without power. There were early reports of five tornadoes, hail and high winds across Michigan on May 15, according to the [Lansing State Journal](#), part of the USA TODAY Network.

Tornado hits Atlantic County New Jersey

The National Weather Service said an EF0 tornado hit Collings Lakes in Atlantic County New Jersey on May 16, [according to the local ABC station](#).

An EFO has maximum winds of 65 to 75 mph. The tornado was on the ground for a minute, felling tree branches and ripping metal roofing from a building.

Contributing: Reuters