

= Windsor Locks , Connecticut tornado =

The Windsor Locks , Connecticut tornado struck the towns of Windsor , Windsor Locks , and Suffield , Connecticut and Feeding Hills , Massachusetts on October 3 , 1979 . The short @-@ lived but intense tornado struck without warning and caused three deaths and 500 injuries .

The storm , rated F4 on the Fujita scale , also caused more than \$ 400 million in property damage along an 11 @.@ 3 @-@ mile (18 @.@ 2 km) path , and ranks as the ninth most destructive tornado in American history .

= = Storm synopsis = =

The storm system that caused the tornado had produced severe weather , including two weak tornadoes , in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey that morning . This was an unusual setup for a significant tornado , associated with a warm front near a low @-@ pressure center . A thunderstorm cell formed south of Long Island around 10 : 20 am , and became a supercell sometime later after interacting with a surface low @-@ pressure center . It turned north as a left @-@ moving supercell , meaning it moved left with respect to the mean atmospheric flow . Left @-@ moving supercells are very rare , as cyclonic storms usually turn to the right of the mean flow . It is unknown whether this leftward movement was due to an atmospheric interaction or terrain @-@ induced movement , as the storm moved straight up the Connecticut River valley .

No tornado watches or warnings were issued before the storm struck . This was later determined to be because of missing atmospheric sounding data , as well as an incorrect assessment of the height of the tropopause , which led to an underestimation of the strength of the thunderstorm which produced the tornado . Although a severe thunderstorm warning was issued at 2 : 57 pm , very few people received the warnings in time .

The tornado touched down in Poquonock , Connecticut , a village in the town of Windsor , just north of Hartford . Poquonock Elementary School was heavily damaged ; fortunately , students were sent home early at 1 : 30 pm on Wednesdays . Students at a Brownie meeting were led into a hallway just before the auditorium they had been in was destroyed . The historic Poquonock Community Church building had its roof ripped off . Miraculously , all but one of the stain glass windows from the old church were salvaged . The tornado traveled almost due north , an unusual direction for a tornado . The most severe damage occurred along River Road , Hollow Brook Road , Pioneer Drive and Settler Circle , where large frame houses were left " in splinters " . The tornado roughly followed Connecticut Route 75 just east of Bradley International Airport . The airport 's weather station recorded a wind gust of 39 m / s (87 mph ; 140 km / h) as the tornado passed nearby . A United Airlines flight with 114 passengers was attempting to land as the tornado was passing the airport ; the pilot saw the tornado and was able to abort the landing just in time . The tornado then crossed the northern portion of the airport , where the New England Air Museum was located . More than 20 vintage aircraft were completely destroyed , with many more damaged . The museum 's hangar was also rendered unusable . The tornado moved north into Feeding Hills before dissipating near the Westfield city line , about five miles north of the Massachusetts state line .

The tornado was accompanied by more than 7 centimetres (2 @.@ 8 in) of rain , and several instances of downburst winds . Damage from downburst winds was reported across the Connecticut River in Enfield .

= = Aftermath = =

Because there were no tornado warnings before the storm (and it occurred in an area where tornadoes are rare) , the initial damage reports claimed an explosion had damaged a roof . Soon , however , the storm 's nature and impact became apparent . Governor Ella Grasso lived just a block away from the tornado 's path , though she was in Hartford at the time of the storm . She declared an 8 pm ? 5 am curfew in the days following the tornado . About 500 National Guardsmen were activated to prevent looting and direct traffic , and the area was declared a disaster area by

President Carter . FEMA trailers were provided within a few days , and were used by many residents until reconstruction or repairs could be completed . In all , at least 38 businesses were damaged or destroyed , 65 homes were completely destroyed , and at least 75 homes were damaged . Twenty @-@ five tobacco sheds were " extensively damaged " . At the airport , at least 30 vintage aircraft were damaged or destroyed , as well as most of the state 's National Guard helicopters . The final damage total reached \$ 200 million (1979 USD) , or \$ 442 million in 1997 dollars .

Because of the vast scope of the damage , initially Windsor town officials feared many , possibly even hundreds , of people could have been killed . While there were many serious injuries , only three people were killed by the storm . Two victims , construction workers working in a bank parking lot , took shelter in a work truck when they saw the storm approach . The first victim was killed immediately by a piece of flying lumber , the other died a few weeks later from his injuries becoming the 3rd victim . The second victim was found the next day across the street from her obliterated house . Over 400 people were hospitalized , mostly for injuries from flying glass or the victims ' having been thrown by winds .

= = Records = =

The tornado was the costliest on record in the Northeastern United States , and the 10 @-@ costliest in US history . The three people who were killed made it the deadliest tornado in Connecticut since the 1878 Wallingford tornado .