Governor says 6 people are dead in Alabama after severe storms and more than 2 dozen tornadoes hit Southeast

CNN — normal

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said Thursday evening there have been six deaths in the state following the severe weather outbreak that spawned more than two dozen tornadoes across the South.

“I am sad to have learned that six Alabamians were lost to the storms that ravaged across our state. My prayers are with their loved ones and communities. We are far too familiar with devastating weather, but our people are resilient. We will get through it and be stronger for it,” the

governor said in a tweet.

The governor didn't say where in the state the fatalities occurred but there were five storm-related deaths in Autauga County, according to Coroner Buster Barber.

At least 20 homes in the county were damaged or destroyed, Autauga County Emergency Management Deputy Director Gary Weaver said.

Autauga County is just east of Dallas County, where a huge tornado ripped through the city of Selma on Thursday afternoon. The twister likely was on the ground for at least 50 miles and caused damage in seven counties across the state, National Weather Service Meteorologist Gerald Satterwhite told CNN.

"It was a pretty significant tornado" with "debris lofted in the air to about 10,000 to 15,000 feet," Satterwhite said.

The tornado was likely an EF-2 or EF-3, he added. It was one of at least 34 tornadoes in the US, according to the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center.

The damage in Selma is widespread, said Dallas County Coroner William Alan Dailey, who is also an EMT. The damage goes from "one side of Dallas County to the other," he said during a video news conference.

Officials said there were no deaths but some people were injured.

What appeared to be an enormous funnel cloud passed through the area, according to images shared by Mike Pitts. After it passed, Pitts' pictures showed homes without roofs, other roofs shorn of shingles, and roads blocked by piles of debris.

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The storm “tore up” Selma resident Krishun Moore’s house, but no one there was injured, she told CNN. She took shelter in a bathroom with her mother.

“All we heard was wind and the whole house was shaking,” Moore said.

Photos that Priscilla Lewis shared with CNN show fallen power poles, debris strewn on the road and heavy damage to at least one building.

“It’s nearly impossible to leave out of downtown Selma,” Lewis said.

Other photos, taken by Kenneth Martin, show the damage from the air. One shows a large building with what appears to be a major roof collapse.

Deborah A. Brown told CNN she was in a tax office in downtown when what she believes was the tornado came down Broad Street.

In a Facebook video posted after the storm came through, Brown can be heard telling people how blessed she and others there were.

"We could have been gone, y'all," she says as she points the camera at an SUV with smashed windows. "We had to run for cover. We had to go run and jump in the closet."

Brown's video shows a huge debris pile dragging power lines down to the ground. In the alleyway next to the building she was in, part of a wall of the structure next door appears to have come down into a heap.

Selma, a city of some 17,000 people roughly 50 miles west of Montgomery, is the site of a landmark 1965 civil rights march in which protesters were beaten and tear-gassed by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, an incident referred to as "Bloody Sunday."

"This is a disaster area. Powerlines are down and trees are down – this is really dangerous," Dallas County Probate Judge Jimmy Nunn said during a news conference.

Mayor James Perkins led a city council meeting that, because of power outages, was held outside city hall with vehicle headlights illuminating the site.

"We've got to layer up and get ready," he said as temperatures in the area began to fall, with the overnight low forecast to be 39 degrees.

He also asked residents to conserve water as the treatment facilities are affected by the power situation.

On Thursday night, tornado watches were in effect in south Georgia with wind advisories still covering parts of Alabama and Georgia. Parts of North Carolina were under a severe thunderstorm warning.

Almost 140,000 customers in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas were without power as of 9:30 p.m. ET, according to PowerOutage.us.

The governors of Alabama and Georgia each issued a state of emergency for parts of their states.

Injuries reported in northern Alabama's Morgan County

Damage reports across the Southeast and the Ohio Valley piled up Thursday as storms progressed. In addition to the dozens of tornado reports, the National Weather Service also logged more than 140 wind reports.

Officials in Alabama's Elmore County told CNN one person was injured and numerous homes were damaged.

There was a "large swath of damage in the northwestern portion of the county," Emergency Management Director Keith Barnett said.

Elmore County is just north of Montgomery.

In northern Alabama's Morgan County alone, a storm caused 10 to 15 injuries Thursday morning – none of which are believed to be life-threatening – and damaged numerous buildings, county sheriff's spokesman Mike Swafford said.

Streets and fields were littered with debris and downed power lines in Decatur, a Morgan County community roughly 25 miles southwest of Huntsville, pictures from city police and the county sheriff's department showed.

Siding was ripped off a Decatur hotel, according to pictures taken by hotel guest Mark Spychala, who said he sheltered in a laundry room as the storm

hit Thursday morning.

"We lost power and could hear the wind and rain" pummel the area outside, Spychala told CNN. The National Weather Service preliminarily attributed the Decatur damage to strong winds.

Several preliminary tornado reports were made in the morning in Alabama, including in northwestern Alabama's Winston County and western Alabama's Sumter County, where building damage was reported, the weather service said.

Downed trees and power lines were reported along several of the roads of Winston County, whose communities are dozens of miles northwest of Birmingham.

"Motorists are urged to only travel roadways in emergency situations and to remain weather aware," the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency said in a series of tweets about the Winston County damage.

In northeastern Mississippi's Monroe County, several rural buildings lay

flattened or severely damaged after a storm passed through Thursday morning, video tweeted by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency shows.

No injuries were reported there, according to the agency, which said a tornado could have caused the damage. The weather service preliminarily said strong winds caused damage in the county.

Wind damage to trees and buildings also were reported in other locations across parts of Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky before noon, the weather service said.

In Georgia, a possible tornado damaged Griffin High School in Griffin, south of Atlanta. Trees came down and there was a leak in the gym, Griffin-Spalding School District spokesperson Adam Pugh said.

Downed trees on Interstate 185 prompted officials to close the highway in Troup County, according to the sheriff's office there.

In Kentucky, three EF-1 tornadoes were confirmed by the weather service office in Louisville. The tornadoes touched down in Henry, Mercer and Boyle counties.

CNN's Paul P. Murphy, Jillian Sykes, Haley Brink, Andy Rose, Taylor Ward, Sharif Paget, Caroll Alvarado and Dave Hennen contributed to this report.