

TEMPERATURE DIPS 11 DEGREES IN 2 HOURS AFTER HEAVY RAIN; 80S MAY SEEM DOWNRIGHT COOL

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SECTION: METRO, Pg. B1

LENGTH: 424 words

Heavy rain and strong wind put an end Wednesday night to the searing heat that scorched the St. Louis area for the last week.

Brilliant flashes of lightning accompanied by loud claps of thunder rumbled through the bistate area beginning about 6 p.m. Meanwhile, the temperature tumbled to 74 degrees at 9 p.m. from 85 at 7 p.m. The high Wednesday was 96.

The weak cold front brought with it high wind that downed power lines throughout the area.

Motorists leaving downtown just after the evening rush hour were slowed on Interstates 55 and 44 by traffic lanes filled with water. Some motorists pulled to the shoulder when heavy rain cut visibility to a few feet.

In St. Louis, flash flooding on Goodfellow Boulevard and Minerva Avenue trapped many cars in several feet of water. Interstate 70 at Goodfellow was closed because of the flash flooding.

Also, a downed power line in the 10200 block of Lookaway Drive trapped several people inside a house. No injuries were reported.

In Fairview Heights, members of the city's planning committee conducted their meeting near a window - the only light source they could find - when the power failed. Collinsville, Caseyville and parts of Belleville also had power outages, flash flooding and downed trees.

Shoppers in part of the Saint Louis Galleria were left in the dark for a brief period at the height of the storm. The Ritz-Carlton St. Louis and other parts of Clayton also lost power.

At one point, more than 105,000 AmerenUE customers without power, according to the utility's spokeswoman, Sue Bell. By 11:30 p.m., service had been restored to 31,000 businesses and households.

Jim Kerber, head usher at The Muny, said the rain had delayed opening of "Fiddler on the Roof" for about an hour.

"People stood on ramps inside and outside the theater while it rained," he said. At 9:14 p.m., stagehands began drying the stage with mops, fans and squeegees.

The sudden change in the weather was caused by a weak cold front that moved into the area from the Great Plains. One of the storm clusters moved into St. Charles and Franklin counties around 7 p.m. Power outages also were reported in Arnold and parts of Jefferson County.

Ron Przybylinski, a science officer with the National Weather Service, said some wind gusts had been recorded at 60 to 70 mph. About 0.57 of an inch of rain fell at Lambert Field during the storm. Some areas reported up to 2 inches of rain.

Forecasters called for a high today in the upper 80s, with a chance of occasional thunderstorms.

LOAD-DATE: July 23, 1998

LANGUAGE: English

GRAPHIC: PHOTO Color Photo by WESLEY LAW / POST-DISPATCH - Storms invade, declare war on heat
A summer storm collided with a summer sunset Wednesday to create this light show behind the Arch. The storm brought a respite from the hot weather that has baked the area for the past week.

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