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LOCAL

Storms flood roads, knock out power

Homes, businesses are damaged as rainfall exceeds 4 inches; parts of interstates were closed.

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ST. LOUIS • Thunderstorms that moved through the St. Louis region late Saturday and early Sunday knocked out electrical power to thousands, flooded roads and interstates and damaged homes and businesses.

The storm dumped nearly 4½ inches of rain at Lambert-St. Louis International airport between 4:45 p.m. Saturday and 7 a.m. Sunday.

At one point, 27,000 Missouri Ameren customers were without power.

The hardest-hit areas were Berkeley and St. Charles, said Ameren spokeswoman Rita Holmes-Bobo. Most of the outages were caused by lightning strikes on transformers and substations, she said.

Crews worked to repair the damage, and all power was expected to be restored by late Sunday.

In Illinois, nearly 17,000 Ameren customers were without power about 2:30 a.m., mostly due to high wind and lightning, spokesman Leigh Morris said.

"If it had been safe to sit outside, you could have read a newspaper. It was that bright," Morris said.

By noon Sunday, 2,600 customers remained without power, almost half of those in St. Clair and Madison counties. Power there was expected to be restored by the end of the day.

The heavy rain flooded many St. Louis streets.

About 3 a.m., flash flooding prompted all lanes to be closed on parts of Interstates 70 and 55, and Highway 40. Police reported cars stalling in high water on Highway 40 near Grand Boulevard. Flooding also closed I-55 at Loughborough Avenue. Highway 40 and Interstate 55 reopened within an hour, said Deanna Venker, MoDOT area engineer.

Floodwater also filled lanes of Highway 141 under Interstate 44 in Valley Park.

In Cahokia, several sewer backups were reported after the heavy rainfall, leaving 5 to 6 feet of water



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Chiriga Garrett (right) and her daughters Jada Garrett (left), 6, and Justice Garrett, 3, rest Sunday afternoon after helping Chiriga Garrett's sister Paula Neely Duckworth sort waterlogged shoes on the front lawn of Duckworth's home in north St. Louis. Flooding in the basement of Duckworth's home at the intersection of Dryden and Korte avenues caused extensive damage.

in some homes' basements in an area off Falling Springs Road. Several streets and yards in the same area remained flooded late Sunday because the sewers still were unable to handle all the water from flash flooding, officials said.

In West County, several water main breaks forced temporary lane and street closures in Frontenac, Creve Coeur and Town and Country, according to a police dispatcher.

A Missouri American Water spokesman said she knew of three 8-inch water main breaks that left several dozen homes

with reduced pressure but said it wasn't clear the breaks were weather-related.

Several north St. Louis homes were evacuated because of flooding, said Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District spokesman Lance LeComb. Most had standing water in their basements.

City and MSD officials ordered the evacuations this morning while inspecting the homes in the 4400 block of Dryden Avenue and Dryden Court. Utilities to the homes were shut off, and police patrolled the area.

Reports of flooding also came

from businesses along Manchester Road in Brentwood, LeComb said.

Those who experienced water backups are asked to call MSD's 24-hour customer service line at 314-768-6260.

In St. Charles, police reported receiving several calls about flooding and downed trees and limbs, mostly north of Interstate 70. Residents of the 80-unit Creekside Apartments at 121 Cole and Boulevard were evacuated after basement and ground-floor apartments flooded with more than 2 feet of water in some in-

stances. It's uncertain when, or if, residents will be allowed back in.

At 2 p.m. Sunday, some lanes of eastbound Interstate 70 between Shreve Avenue and West Florissant Avenue remained closed due to buckled pavement from a sewer line collapse.

Late Sunday afternoon, heavy rain fell across southern Jefferson County and northern St. Francois County. Bonne Terre and De Soto were among the towns under a flash flood warning.

Today's high is expected to be in the low 90s with a 50 percent chance of storms.

Several North City residents were evacuated from their homes after Saturday's storm caused damaging sewer backups.

Local leaders will hold two town hall meetings at The Sanctuary, 4449 Red Bud Ave., to address residents' concerns about damages. One will take place tonight, June 29, at 6 p.m., and the second will be on Thursday, June 30, at 2 p.m. Representative Jamilah Nasheed, Alderman Antonio French, and Metropolitan Sewer District representatives will be present to answer questions.

The Metropolitan Sewer District representatives said four-to-six inches of rain dropped in a 90-minute period and overwhelmed the system.

"There is no system you can build to handle these kinds of storms," said Metropolitan Sewer District representative Lance LeComb. "It's a function of too much rain coming out of the sky."

Since midnight on Saturday, MSD has received more than 500 calls, he said. More than a dozen homes were evacuated and condemned along Dryden Court near Interstate 70 and Shreve, said Ward 21 Alderman Antonio French. No neighborhood was hit harder than the Penrose neighborhood, he said.

"We will fight to see that MSD does right by the people affected by this weekend's flooding," French said.

French told The American that he met with residents of Essex Place on Sunday morning and spent "the next 48 hours helping folks get their lives back on track."

LeComb said that MSD has checked through their system, records and data to make sure it was functioning the way it was supposed to. So far, they have seen nothing that would point to anything going wrong, he said.

"When it does rain that much, there are things that are out of our control or anyone else's control," he said.

However, area residents are not convinced of MSD's claim.

Since Leeroy Ray moved into his house on Essex Place in 2006, he has experienced more than \$30,000 in water damage from three different storms. Saturday's storm was the most damaging.

"I had five feet of water in the basement at certain points," he said. "I lost everything in my basement."

The flooding took out his water heater, air conditioning unit, furniture, washer and dryer, and everything else. He estimates the damage will total about \$15,000. So the \$2,400 reimbursement check he could receive from MSD is not comforting, even with his home insurance covering some costs.

"You keep making insurance claims they are going to drop you or raise rates through the roof," he said. "You are stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's a real problem that they are not trying to address. \$2,400 will not cover replacing the furnace yourself."

Ray said the sewer system in the front of his house can't handle any heavy rain, but other parts of the metropolitan area don't seem to have that problem. The streets buckled at Marcus and Natural Bridge avenues and Marcus and Essex Place.

"You could literally swim off my front porch to Natural Bridge," he said.

Ray and his family were just recovering from the last storm, which hit on his birthday, May 26, 2010. It caused \$8,000 in damage.

"Three out of four years, there has to be a flaw in your system," he said. "They want you to sign a waiver and walk away. I'm scratching my vacation plans. In the next month, my kids are going back to school. And they want to play the lowball game."

Currently he is living with my parents again until his family gets the money to get things replaced.

Residents with basement backups should call the 24-hour customer service center at (314) 768-6260. Storms tend to wash debris into inlets, and after storms MSD crews need to go out and clean the debris from the sewer system.

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In some cases, residents may be eligible for reimbursement through MSD's insurance program. MSD will reimburse up to \$2,500 -with a \$100 deductible-to cover some of the damages that occur during the backup. To be eligible for coverage, you must contact MSD at 768-6260 within 30 days of the basement backup.

Residents who need the assistance of local disaster relief agencies and municipal disaster response organizations are asked to call the United Way's 2-1-1 hotline. For more information on basement backups, clean up tips and additional information, visit <http://www.stlmsd.com/customerservice/serviceproblems/BasementCleanUpGuide>

Residents who live in the areas of Newstead and Dryden, or Marcus and Essex can place damaged, wet bulk items in front of their houses or alleys, and refuse will be by daily to pick up those items. For assistance with bulk item removal, call the 21st Ward TMAP Headquarters at 769-9000.

There will also be a volunteer workday 9 a.m., Saturday in the Penrose neighborhood to assist with bulk item removal and storm clean-up.