

AREA IS LASHED BY STORM

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Thunderstorms and high wind swept into the St. Louis area Saturday night, bringing respite from the latest heat wave - but at a price that included downed trees, power outages, flash flooding, and a canceled circus performance. The storms hit about 7:45 Saturday evening, with gusts of more than 40 miles an hour, said Mark Moede, a forecaster for WeatherData Inc. of Wichita, Kan. St. Louis Regional Hospital had to divert ambulances for an hour because of flash flooding, said Rodney Dreifuss, chief of the city's Emergency Medical Service. From about 8:30 to 9:30, the emergency room treated walk-in patients, but ambulances were unable to get in. From 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., the ambulance service had 21 calls for auto accidents and pedestrians struck, far above normal. In the 4600 block of McMillan, paramedics found a man whose car was filled with water. His heart had stopped, and paramedics tried to revive him. He was taken to Barnes Hospital. Meanwhile, at Union Station, about half a dozen people injured knees, ankles or elbows when they slipped on the mall's wet floors caused by flash flooding during the storm. At the St. Louis Soccer Park & Conference Center near Fenton, the wind virtually destroyed two bleacher sections that were blown 35 feet onto the field. Two large tents were downed and the field's AstroTurf was damaged. About 8,000 customers of Union Electric Co. in north and south St. Louis County were without electricity about 10 p.m. Saturday night as a result of the storm, said Gary Nevels, spokesperson for UE. All of the customers were expected to be restored within a few hours, Nevels said. "It was mainly due to the wind," Nevels said of the damage. High wind caused damage all over the area. "Winds . . . lots of heavy winds," said Gilbert DeNormandie, battalion chief for the Valley Park Fire Department. The 700 block of Marshall Road in Valley Park was closed to traffic in Valley Park after a transformer blew up and power lines fell across the road, DeNormandie said. But he reported no injuries in the storm. The wind blew dust and patio umbrellas into the crowd awaiting a performance by the Mannheim Steamroller orchestra at the newly opened Riverport Amphitheater in Earth City. The audience fled to the covered portion of the outdoor theater, and the show went on. But the Shrine Circus at Busch Stadium was canceled shortly after it began, to protect of the performers. The circus will be repeated tonight for Saturday ticketholders as a Father's Day special performance. Additional tickets are available, and fathers will be admitted free if other family members buy tickets, a spokeswoman said. Saturday ticketholders must bring their stubs and rainchecks, the spokeswoman said. At the Edelweiss Tavern in Carpenter, Ill., in Madison County, marble-sized hail, strong winds and rain put a damper on the night. "It caused me a lot of problems," said Lloyd Lewis, tavern owner. "I had a band booked to play outside, and they're canceled. The power was out for 30 minutes." At the soccer park near Fenton, security guard A.L. "Tiny" Leslie said, "We've got trees blown down, trash cans clear out on the service road - it hit pretty hard out here." The storm was a "typical" violent early summer thunderstorm, with dramatic changes in temperature and pressure, said Moede at WeatherData. It started in northwestern Missouri, around St. Joseph, and swept across the state, growing and gathering in intensity, until it hit the St. Louis area. The temperature dropped 17 degrees in an hour, to 71 degrees at 9 p.m. from 88 degrees at 8. Atmospheric pressure had a similarly dramatic change, only it increased, as pressure does during a storm. The storm went on into southern

Illinois and was expected to blow itself out overnight. Saturday was the second day in a row with a high of 95 degrees, and the third day of a heat warning declared by area health officials. On Saturday, one area woman believed to be suffering from heat exhaustion was taken to Barnes Hospital, authorities said. And four St. Louis firefighters were treated for heat exhaustion after fighting a two-alarm fire at 4246 McPherson Avenue in the Central West End. Fifty firefighters battled the fire. Paramedics helped cool off the firefighters at the scene. Moede said temperatures were expected to cool off Sunday and Monday, with highs in the mid to upper 80s. Jo Mannies and Kim Bell of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed information for this story.

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GRAPHIC: Map; MAP by Post-Dispatch ... 30-Day Outlook ... two maps of the United States, one showing temperature and the other showing precipitation. (source: WeatherData, Inc.)

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