

3-INCH RAIN IS CAUSING SPOT FLOODS

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A thunderstorm dumped up to 3 1/2 inches of rain in the St. Louis area on Sunday afternoon, overwhelming sewers, flooding streets and causing power outages and traffic accidents. The report of the heaviest rainfall came from near Gravois Avenue and Grand Boulevard, where the 3 1/2 inches was measured, said Vince Acquaviva, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in St. Peters. "The storm developed right on top of us," Acquaviva said. He described it as "one big thunderstorm about 40 to 50 miles in diameter." Hardest hit as the storm moved east-southeast were south St. Louis, south St. Louis County and Jefferson County, he said. The storm dissipated as it moved into Southern Illinois, he said. Rain peppered Busch Stadium lightly as the Cardinals played the Pittsburgh Pirates. But the downpour - at least around the Stadium - held off until after the 12-4 washout by the visiting team. City police said the storm was particularly severe in southwest St. Louis. Police received numerous reports of flash flooding - which stranded some motorists in their cars for brief periods - fallen tree limbs, downed electrical wires and traffic accidents. No serious injuries were reported. Police Chief Robert E. Scheetz, who lives in St. Louis Hills on the South Side, said Childress Avenue near Francis Park looked like a raging river. "It was white-water rapids," Scheetz said. "I'd say the water in the street was 16-18 inches deep." The storm also left 6 inches of water in Scheetz's basement. The torrent was too much for the storm sewers in the 3400 block of Goodfellow Boulevard on the North Side, where police said five vehicles were stranded when they tried to ford a pool 3 feet deep and about 150 feet long. "I thought it was just a little puddle of water," said Larry Jones, 37, of Berkeley. About 3:30 p.m., his Cadillac became one of the first vehicles to stall. When Jones rolled down his window to escape, muddy water flooded the interior. An hour later, the water had receded and Jones' car still wouldn't start. He dragged his finger across the mud on an armrest and said, "My insurance company is not going to believe this." While Jones waited for a tow truck, he explained that after he got stuck in the water, he had tried to deter other motorists from meeting the same fate. Bystanders said a pickup truck and another car had floated several feet after stalling in the pool. "They were floating like boats," said Anthony Pulliam, 10, who had watched the water rise with friends. "It just started getting higher and higher. People kept driving right into it." The water was deepest near Goodfellow and Selber Court, the entrance to the Hillvale apartment complex, where Anthony and others who were watching live. One resident, Stephanie Hutch, said motorists "were getting out of their cars and wading through water up to their chests." "It was funny," Hutch said. "I mean, it wasn't funny, but if you could have seen them." Another resident, Courtney West, said the storm sewers were apparently in need of repair. "It's never gone this high, but it's been bad around here for years," West said. "I don't know what they need to do, but the sewers around here are real bad." Terry Briggs, a spokesman for the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District, said four of five standby crews had been called in to handle reports of flooded basements and streets primarily on the city's South Side and in South County. Each crew of four workers was trying to unclog blockages in the main sewer lines, he said. "Too much water got into the system," Briggs said. "It rained too hard, too fast in an isolated area. It's a little bit uncommon in South County and south St. Louis. It's unusual because they have combined sewers," which

have a larger capacity to handle storm water and waste water. As the water surged into the system, backups occurred in some basements, Briggs said. Streets were flooded primarily because the intakes were clogged with debris, he said. Tom Dehner, a spokesman for Union Electric, said most damage to electrical lines occurred in the southern parts of St. Louis County and portions of Jefferson and Franklin counties. Between 2,500 and 3,000 customers were without power Sunday night because of trees and branches falling across electric wires, he said. Power may not be restored to all customers until sometime Monday, Dehner said. A dispatcher for the city's Fire Department said lightning had struck a building in south St. Louis but caused no fire or damage. He did not know the building's address. Butch Dye, a Weather Service specialist, said 0.64 inches of rain was measured by 7 p.m. at Lambert Field, bringing the yearly total to 16.01 inches. The normal for the year is 16.4 inches, he said. Bill Bryan and Tim Novak of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed information for this story.

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GRAPHIC: Photo; PHOTO (COLOR)...Wes Paz/Post-Dispatch...Larry Jones of Berkeley looking on as he waits for rainwater at the intersection of Goodfellow Boulevard and Selbert Avenue to subside after a downpour on Sunday afternoon. Water at the intersection reached a depth of nearly four feet... PHOTO...Joy Magnah...A car on a lot in the 3300 block of South Kingshighway after a severe downpour dumped 3 1/2 inches on the area Sunday...

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