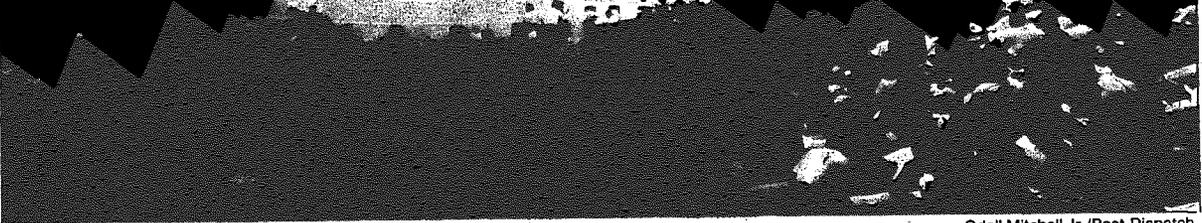


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Odell Mitchell Jr./Post-Dispatch

Arena Gathering

Jehovah's Witnesses from Missouri, Southern Illinois, Arkansas and Iowa attending a "Trust in Jehovah" convention

Sunday at The Arena. U.S. membership in the sect is about 700,000.

Storm Blamed For 1 Death, Power Outages

By Cynthia Todd
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

A severe thunderstorm that rumbled through the St. Louis area Sunday left a volunteer firefighter dead, knocked out electricity to at least 8,000 homes and caused problems on at least 700 telephone lines.

The afternoon storm also sent people at the VP Fair and the St. Charles Riverfest scurrying for cover. For about 20 minutes, wind gusted up to 55 mph. The storm started at 1:23 p.m. Sunday. The heavy rain lasted about 15 minutes, officials said, but rain continued to fall for two hours.

Franklin County authorities said a volunteer firefighter from New Haven had been killed on his way to a fire when a tree fell and crushed his car.

The firefighter, Dwayne VonBehren, 32, was driving in New Haven about 12:30 p.m. when a tree struck by lightning fell on his car, police said. He was pronounced dead on arrival at St. John's Mercy Hospital in Washington, in Franklin County.

In Jefferson City, a funnel cloud was spotted near the Capitol by its security staff, police said. Some people touring the Capitol were taken to the basement.

A large tree was blown down in front of the governor's mansion, but there were no reports that a funnel cloud touched down, police said.

The wind stranded boats, overturned two campers and damaged a lighthouse at a marina near Columbia, Mo., but no injuries were reported, police said.

In New Douglas, in Madison County, officials reported pea-size hail.

The storm followed a severe thunderstorm warning issued by the National Weather Service.

The official rainfall at Lambert Field was 0.30 of an inch. Officials said the total rainfall at Lambert between Saturday night and Sunday had been 0.44 of an inch.

Officials forecasted a chance for more thunderstorms after midnight Sunday; they expect the rain to continue through midweek.

Officials estimated that about a half-inch of rain had fallen at the VP Fair Sunday. And wind blew down numerous tents on the grounds.

Sunday was the third consecutive day that the event was dampened by rain.

At the St. Charles Riverfest, tents were flattened, and souvenirs were blown across the grounds of Frontier Park.

The storm also downed large tree limbs and power lines about 10 miles east of Washington.

Officials at the Weather Service said the wind also had torn off the roof of a meat market in Wright City, 45 miles west of St. Louis. Bill Wipfler, a meteorologist at the Weather Service, said that the storm had downed several trees in west St. Louis County.

The storm cooled the temperature, which dropped 11 degrees to 70 from 81 after the storm moved eastward. The Weather Service says the high

today will be in the mid-90s.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. reported between 900 and 1,000 trouble calls Sunday after the storm. Spokesman David Martin said problems had ranged from static on telephone lines to disconnections.

Telephone lines to the repair office of Union Electric were tied up for

hours after the storm.

Gene Cerulo, a spokesman for Union Electric, said that the storms that hit the area between Saturday night and Sunday afternoon had cut service to 14,000 customers. By late Sunday, service was restored to all but 4,000 households, Cerulo said.

Officials of the Missouri Water Pa-

trol said the weekend probably had accounted for a relatively safe holiday on the state's lakes and rivers.

"It has been pretty safe," Capt. Dennis Haupt said from his office in Jefferson City. "There were quite a few people out there. But the weather kind of chases people off the rivers."

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