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Two buildings struck by lightning, three tornado warnings issued, streets heavily flooded in Friday storm

By KEVIN LANDRIGAN New Hampshire Union Leader Aug 4, 2018



North Commercial Street in Manchester was flooded during the rainstorm Friday, Aug. 3, 2018.

Brendan McQuaid/New Hampshire Union Leader

Severe thunderstorms and torrential downpours touched off wild weather Friday afternoon into the evening with at least two lightning strikes of buildings, three tornado warnings, and heavily flooded streets in Manchester, according to forecasters and first responders.

And the National Weather Service in Gray, Maine, says the heavy rains will continue with a posted flash flood warning for most of New Hampshire through 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 4.

“The most serious situation was we had significant flooding and storm drain clogs in several communities,” said Perry Plummer, state director of the division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management.

Summer dry heat returns on Sunday, Aug. 5, with highs just above 90 degrees and temperatures in the mid-90s with more humidity on Monday, Aug. 6, forecasters said.

The most serious fire incident was in Hopkinton when a lightning strike ignited a two-alarm fire in the rafters of the Hopkinton Town Library at 61 Houston Drive.

Firefighters from Hopkinton and five other communities battled the blaze, which had broken out at 5 p.m.

Library Director Donna Dunlap said there was heavy water and smoke damage inside and that rooms with bookshelves and reading displays incurred much of the damage.

There were not many patrons in the building at the time; all were safely evacuated and there were no injuries, officials said.

Retired Union Leader senior staff photographer Bob LaPree lives less than a half-mile from the scene and got there as quickly as some of the neighboring town firefighters did.

“I am not a fire chaser anymore but when there is something like this, you head to that scene. It’s a beautiful building, a Taj Mahal of libraries, because that’s what we build in Hopkinton,” LaPree quipped.

The town will celebrate the building’s 20th anniversary this October, officials said.

“The firefighters did a great job of containing what would have been a much more serious fire,” LaPree added.

In Manchester, forecasters said 2 to 3 inches of heavy rain fell in 90 minutes Friday afternoon, overwhelming many city streets and stranding many drivers in their cars.

Manchester fire responders rescued several residents in the areas of Beech and Auburn streets near the JFK Arena. There were also some people caught in their cars in the area of Valley and Belmont streets where many cars had water halfway up their doors.

Into the early evening there was heavy standing water on North Commercial Street in Manchester as well.

The lightning and heavy rains caused fire alarms to go off throughout the city for a few hours Friday, officials said.

During the middle of the heavy rainstorm, Manchester public works and fire officials were advising residents to stay off the roads altogether to help give street crews room to more easily clear clogged storm drains and reduce the standing rain water.

About 2:30 p.m., Manchester public safety officials responded to another lightning strike fire, this one to the barn of a three-story residence at 1105 Union St.

Officials said the quick response and work of ladder truck personnel contained the fire to the barn and did not allow it to spread to the dwelling.

There were no injuries, officials said.

The heavy rains were accompanied by hours of rolling thunder, along with the lightning strikes and hail, which was reported as being about golf-ball sized in some communities in the southern part of the state, weather forecasters said.

There were three tornado warnings, according to the National Weather Service. The first one was in Cheshire County in the area of Keene, another was in Merrimack County and the third was in the region straddling Rockingham and Strafford counties, in the area of Barrington and Dover.

There were no reported touchdowns of tornadoes but the heavy winds did contribute to outages throughout the day and early evening.

As of 7 p.m., there were 1,731 customers of the four largest electric utilities in the dark with the highest numbers reported in Gilmanton (328), Durham (297) and Rindge (258). Earlier Friday, significant numbers in Goffstown, Northfield and Stratham were also without power, utility officials reported.

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