



Pieces of the Buccaneer Arena roof litter the parking lot after a strong storm blew through the Des Moines metro. KELSEY CRENSHAW/THE REGISTER

Storm leaves widespread damage

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As Brienne Cummins looked out the front window of her home at 725 Polk Blvd., on Monday morning, she thought she was witnessing a tornado.

What she was seeing was a rare meteorological phenomenon called a derecho, a straight-line wind storm that can cause heavy rain, flash flooding, hurricane-

force winds and tornadoes.

As the system moved across Iowa, winds of 74 mph were recorded at the Des Moines International Airport, National Weather Service meteorologist Roger Vachalek said.

The storm ripped through central Iowa mid-morning Monday, taking down trees and damaging the roof at Buccaneer Arena, home of the USHL's Des Moines Buccaneers junior hockey team in Granger. Several people were injured and widespread property damage was reported in Marshall County in central Iowa after 300 mph winds swept through the area, said

Klin Elliot, its homeland security coordinator.

While a tornado did not touch down outside Cummins' house, she said it certainly felt like it. Cummins, a hairstylist who runs her business out of her home, and a customer watched at 10:45 a.m. as the sky suddenly darkened and the wind picked up. The power went out.

A tree in Cummins' backyard fell onto her neighbor's garage, piercing its metal roof. Debris was blown up and down Polk Boulevard, which felt like the epicenter of the storm, Cummins said.

"It was like a movie," Cummins said.

"because we saw these branches lift up and then just throw down."

More than 250,000 Mid-American Energy customers, including 100,000 just in the Des Moines metro area, lost power, said Mid-American Energy spokeswoman Tina Hoffman.

"It's one of the worst storms we've seen in terms of total number of customers impacted," she said. "This was a very widespread storm that has caused significant damage. It really worked its way across the state since this morning."

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Derecho

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Rich Vanderport, a retired machinist and assistant pastor at First Baptist Church at 3020 E. 38th St., in Des Moines, was in the church for a routine Monday meeting when, like Cummins, he saw the sky darken and winds intensify.

"I was caught off guard," Vanderport said.

Ten minutes, at 11 a.m., he began his drive back to the southwest side of Des Moines. Two blocks into his drive, a tree fell on the front end of his 2004 Chevrolet pickup.

The front end of his car hit the tree, smashing the windshield, but the cab never buckled, Vanderport said. A couple of hours later, he was waiting in a church van for Mid-American Energy to remove power lines from the truck so it could be towed, Vanderport said.

He felt fortunate to escape uninjured. "The Lord was good," Vanderport said. "I didn't get hurt."

What is a derecho, anyway?

Compared to tornadoes and hurricanes, derechos are relatively obscure. But like the one that swept across central Iowa on Monday, they pack a destructive wallop.

The term derecho (duh-RAY'-choh) was coined in 1888, according to Ken Pryor, a research meteorologist at the Center for Satellite Applications and Research at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in College Park, Maryland. The word is Spanish for "straight ahead" or "direct."

Derechos can pack lethal gusts in excess of 100 mph — hurricane strength — across a front stretching for many miles, and last for hours. Storms have sustained gusts of at least 58 mph and leave a path of damage at least 250 miles long to qualify as a derecho, according to the National Weather Service.

Derechos develop in the northern hemisphere during warm weather and may be accompanied or preceded by violent thunderstorms. A derecho may also spin off tornadoes.

Amee Cortese was getting ready to do laundry at the apartment house where she lives near 34th and Pleasant streets when a large tree fell on the home. Her family remained safe through the storm.

"We heard this loud thud, Cortese said. "Then the power went out."

Donna and Ralph Riech own the three-apartment building where Cortese lives and manage about 10 houses on the block.

In about 50 years of business, they've seen trees fall onto properties before.

Ralph Riech was already repairing the roof when a Register reporter arrived.

"You know, it's the weather," Donna Riech said. "You have to be prepared."

Also in the Des Moines area Monday, at least three semis crashed on Interstate 35 and snarled traffic, according to the Iowa Department of Transportation. At one

point the rain and winds were so heavy that motorists stopped on the interstates, authorities said.

Outside Cummins' home on Polk Boulevard, vehicles were damaged, she said. Cummins had to close her business for about a month earlier in the year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Monday she cleared her schedule for the week because she anticipated not having power.

The storm felt like another kick an already tough year, she said.

"I'm hoping that I can turn that into insurance for lost wages, but I don't know if that's covered under my home insurance or business insurance," Cummins said.

Hoffman from Mid-American Energy said all of the utility's crews are out responding, and they are requesting additional assistance from crews outside the area. The biggest problems that crews are encountering are downed power lines.

"There is a lot of damage, and unfortunately this is not something that can be repaired very quickly," Hoffman said. "This is going to be a multi-day restoration effort."

"It's going to be a while."