

Disaster relief crews respond to deadly tornado outbreak

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Mark Wakefield took cover with coworkers at the Alabama State Board of Missions facility, about 10 miles from a deadly Autauga County tornado, before stepping into action.

Many have stepped up alongside the state's disaster relief director, not just in Alabama but Georgia and Kentucky as well, to respond to a series of Jan. 12 tornadoes that left at least nine dead.

The line of storms brought multiple tornadoes in the northern and central areas of Alabama, including EF-2 damage in Selma and a confirmed EF-3 further east in Autauga County that resulted in at least seven deaths. It is unclear if the same tornado hit both areas.

In Georgia, a 5-year-old died when a tree fell on the car in which he was riding. A state employee was also killed. Four tornadoes were confirmed in the state.

Four tornadoes also touched down in Kentucky, causing no deaths but damaging some barns and homes. A fifth tornado, an EF-1 like the others, moved across Ballard and McCracken counties as well as into Massac County, Ill.

Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief chainsaw teams are responding to damage in Pleasureville—not that the events of the day brought a lack of options.

“Rain, hail, snow, tornadoes and an earthquake,” Kentucky Baptist disaster relief director Ron Crowe said on Jan. 13. “That was yesterday.”

The U.S. Geological Survey reported a 2.6 magnitude earthquake Thursday

morning, Jan. 12, in central Kentucky.

Churches ‘wanting to reach out to others’

Georgia Baptist disaster relief teams set up at Union Baptist Church to deploy to damaged areas in Griffin for chainsaw work, chaplaincy and further assessment, said state director Dwain Carter.

Chris Reynolds, regional catalyst for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board’s Pastor Wellness Department, accompanied Carter and Troup Baptist Association mission strategist Andy Buchanan to assess damage and meet pastors around LaGrange. A disaster relief base was established for that area at Calloway Baptist Church.

“I’m encouraged by all of our churches calling and expressing their desire to help,” Buchanan said. “They’re wanting to reach out to others.”

Reynolds said: “Pastors are looking beyond their needs to step in to their communities and serve with the love and compassion of Christ.”

A chainsaw team from Hephzibah/Kilpatrick Association responded to reported damage in Warren County, Ga., on the eastern side of the state, but the damage was contained to a rural area.

Alabama Baptists’ early response included two teams from West Central Association in Selma; several associational teams from Tuskegee-Lee and East Liberty associations, alongside those in Tallapoosa Association; teams from Autauga and Chilton Associations in Autauga County; and volunteers from Elmore Association.

Teams will be rotating in and out, with the focus on chainsaw work and tarping, he said.

“At this point there hasn’t been a request for mass feeding, but we’re ready to answer the call if needed,” Wakefield told BP. Conversations have also taken place for potential partnerships with The Salvation Army.

Fairview Baptist Church in Selma received moderate damage, he reported. Another church not affiliated with the SBC suffered heavy damage.

“I’ve met with that pastor and offered assistance to him,” Wakefield said.