

TBM brings relief in sweltering East Texas after storms

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When 100 mph winds knocked out the power to about 150,000 East Texans and large trees fell across houses, people searched for help in the face of oppressive Texas heat.

Families struggled to eat as their electric appliances were rendered useless and food went bad in their refrigerators. Many were stuck, as trees fell on their homes or their cars.

Texas Baptist Men disaster relief teams converged on the area to help people where they were and carved a way for them to get out.



TBM chainsaw volunteer Bruce Slaven works to clear a fallen tree from a home in East Texas. (TBM Photo / Ferrell Foster)

Two TBM chainsaw teams are cutting and removing the fallen trees and limbs, while a TBM emergency food service team is providing meals in multiple cities.

The affected area spans seven counties, and the Texas Department of Emergency Management has received more than 1,000 requests for assistance. The TBM hotline for chainsaw work requests rings at least every four minutes.

“There’s so much damage, it’s unbelievable,” said Wendell Romans, TBM coordinator of the East Texas response. “People don’t understand what’s here. I’m about to put all our chainsaw teams on standby, and I’m about to start rotating them through.”

This will be a lengthy TBM deployment.

“TBM volunteers are working one project at a time,” said Rupert Robbins, associate director of TBM disaster relief. “They’re helping one family at a time. We’re committed to being there for an extended time. We’re looking at being in play there for weeks.”



TBM volunteer Andy Stern

works with an emergency food service crew in East Texas.
(TBM Photo / Ferrell Foster)

Hours after the storm, the TBM chainsaw team from the Harmony-Pittsburg Baptist Association deployed to help their neighbors. Since then, they've crisscrossed East Texas helping people, and they've been joined by the TBM chainsaw crew from the Collin Baptist Association.

Melissa Bernal is among the people the Harmony-Pittsburg team helped. She huddled in her closet and prayed for protection as the storm moved over her house. The storm blew a large tree over on her car, shattering the windows.

Shortly after, the TBM team showed up. With skid-steers, chainsaws and a variety of equipment, they cut up the tree and placed it where it will be removed.

"We have these beautiful people that are out here helping to clear it all up, and we're so grateful, so grateful," Bernal told KLTV.

TBM volunteers valiantly are fighting heat indexes above 110 degrees. They're eating breakfast at 5 a.m. so they can start sawing earlier and still work full days.

"It's incredibly hot. It's dangerously hot," Robbins said. "We're hammering people to stay hydrated. They're standing up to the task to get it done.

"Everything in the first week of disaster is chaotic, but they're being flexible, so they can feed people and take care of people who have trees on their houses."

Romans asked Christians to pray for "strength to start with. Endurance. I feel so sorry for the guys in the heat. They come in dragging."

“They don’t want to quit. They want to help so bad,” Romans said. “A guy came in yesterday and said, ‘I had to quit when I couldn’t lift the saw anymore.’”