

Texas Baptists respond in wake of damaging and deadly spring storms

May 15, 2015

From Cisco in West Texas to Van in East Texas, [Texas Baptist Men](#) disaster relief crews sprung into action after a series of severe thunderstorms blew through the state.



A Texas Baptist Men volunteer crew aids in cleanup after a tornado hit Van, Texas. (Photo: Tony Rolater/Texas Baptist Men) A tornado touched down May 9 in the Cisco area, claiming one life and injuring at least three people.

The next day, a tornado hit Van, killing two people, injuring dozens and destroying or severely damaging about 120 homes.

On May 12, TBM set up its mobile command post at [First Baptist Church in](#)

[Van](#), where the American Red Cross established a community shelter. [First Baptist Church in Edom](#), about 10 miles away, provided meals for shelter residents and housing for TBM volunteers.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas sent a team from [Texas Baptists' Disaster Recovery](#) ministry to assess damage and evaluate an appropriate long-term volunteer response.

In disasters, TBM provides immediate relief for survivors and support for first-responders and emergency personnel. Texas Baptists' Disaster Recovery program focuses on involving churches in long-term community recovery.

By May 13, TBM volunteers went to work—chainsaw crews from Terrell and Athens, heavy equipment operators from Terrell, a team from [Soda Lake Baptist Association](#) ready to cover damaged roofs with blue tarps, a crew from [Ellis Baptist Association](#) who distributed cardboard boxes to allow storm victims to gather their possessions, and a light tower crew from [Pineywoods Baptist Camp](#) in Woodlake, who were prepared to provide lighting for emergency response personnel in the event of a power outage. On May 14, TBM sent its state childcare unit and trained volunteers to Van.

Jimmy Bowlin of Tenaha, who served as a TBM chaplain in Van, recalled a man he met there. The man and his children had gathered in their home's central hallway during the storm—praying for God to spare them—as the tornado ripped the roof off above their heads.



Home damaged by a tornado that hit Van, Texas. (Photo: Gerald Davis/Texas Baptists' Disaster Recovery) As Bowlin prayed with the storm survivor, the man became overwhelmed by emotion, grateful for God's goodness and the volunteers' service.

In the Cisco area, [First Baptist Church in Canyon Lake](#) and [Abilene Baptist Association](#) supplied chainsaw crews, said Ben Moberley of Spring Branch, state chainsaw coordinator for TBM. [Possum Kingdom First Baptist Church in Graford](#) deployed a team of heavy equipment operators.

"There appears to be enough tree damage for two chainsaw crews for several days, and an abundance of skid-steer cleanup work," Alan Fires from Possum Kingdom wrote in an email to Terry Henderson, TBM state director of disaster relief, noting the number of jobs would depend on the number of those requesting assistance.

TBM has an incident-management team on the scene, coordinating operations from the [First Baptist Church in Cisco](#), Henderson noted.



Trees broken by a tornado that ripped through Van, Texas. (Photo: Gerald Davis/Texas Baptists' Disaster Recovery) Meanwhile, [Denton Baptist Association](#) activated a chainsaw crew and box ministry team to assist the storm response of emergency personnel in Denton, joined by a chainsaw crew from the [Collin Baptist Association](#). Collin Association also sent a mud-out unit to assist a homeowner in Celina, north of Frisco, Henderson noted.

TBM disaster relief relies entirely on donations. To give, [click here](#) or send a check designated "disaster relief" to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron, Dallas 75227.

To donate to Texas Baptists' Disaster Recovery initiatives, [click here](#). For up-to-date information about recovery efforts in Van and volunteer opportunities for groups and individuals, visit texasbaptists.org/disaster and sign up for the volunteer corps newsletter.

With additional reporting by Leah Allen with Texas Baptist Communications