

Major Wind Storm Strikes Western Texas and Southern New Mexico

On December 8, 2009 a broad upper-level trough covered the western United States with an embedded and very energetic short wave moving across the central and southern Rocky Mountains during the morning and early afternoon. The dynamics of the upper disturbance were enhanced by pronounced jet stream aloft which included wind speeds of 160 mph extending across southern New Mexico. The enhanced dynamics generated a deep surface low pressure system which moved across northern New Mexico into the northern Texas panhandle. This pattern induced very strong pressure gradients both at the surface and aloft resulting in a major wind storm and widespread damage over the borderland Tuesday morning and early afternoon.

Winds gusted to around 100 mph east of Las Cruces at St. Augustine Pass and Aguirre Springs, seriously damaging a large administrative building at White Sands Missile Range where 2 people suffered minor injuries. Further north, wind gusts near 70 mph blew down trees and over a hundred power lines around Cloudcroft and Mescalero, and damaged numerous buildings including the Elderly Care Center. Power was knocked out across this area with some people expected to be without electricity for over a week. The village of Cloudcroft was under a state of emergency.



Damaged administrative building at White Sands Missile Range... Shari Vialpando Las Cruces Sun News



Elderly Care Center Mescalero courtesy of Mereya Braden Ruidoso News

El Paso Texas was also hard hit as winds gusted to near 80 mph over eastern portions of the city blowing roofs off of buildings and breaking the windshields of a large number of motor vehicles. Several children suffered minor injuries when high winds shattered windows on their school bus. The winds also collapsed a large awning on Cohen Stadium. Falling rocks and debris resulted in the closure of Trans Mountain Road and Highway 54 contributing to traffic jams in the city. Trees and power lines were also blown down causing electrical outages. Downed power lines even initiated a fire which destroyed a building in Hueco Village.

The winds brought widespread blowing dust which lowered visibilities to under a half mile over portions of Interstate 10 between El Paso and Las Cruces and also around Deming. In addition the storm system produced almost 4 inches of snow near Pinos Altos. By mid afternoon winds diminished as the storm moved east of the region.



Damage carport in El Paso. El Paso Fire Department for the El Paso Times