1985 Tornado Outbreak Revisited

• Nick Sleptzoff, Former EMA Director, Erie County Emergency Management Agency
• Tim Dunkle, Former EMA Director, Venango County Emergency Management Agency

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency
“Partners in Professionalism”
September 28-30, 2009
Erie County, PA
Population around 280,000

Approx. 75% pop. N I-90

Poor to no coverage
May 31, 1985

“The day the twisters came.”

Twenty four years ago, a line of fierce tornadoes attacked Western Pa., leaving 65 dead.
Weather Conditions

Several days prior to 5/31, weather unstable, very warm and muggy with afternoon thunderstorms, tornado watches.

May 31, air unstable, weather very warm and very humid, mid 80’s.
May 31, 1985 National Weather Service Issue Tornado Watch at 16:48

21076MM-NWS
: MSG ALL SS ALL II

PHLSLSFA
: ALB,PIT,CLE,CRW,ILC,PHL:TTAA00 KPHL 312049

BULLETIN
SEVERE LOCAL STORM WATCH AND AREAL OUTLINE
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE PHILADELPHIA, PA

168 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985
TORNADO WATCH #211 HAS BEEN ISSUED
BY THE NATIONAL SEVERE STORMS FORECAST CENTER

FROM 500 PM EDT UNTIL 1100 PM EDT THIS FRIDAY AFTERNOON AND EVENING

PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES INCLUDED ARE

ALLEGHENY ARMSTRONG BEAVER
BUTLER CAMERON CLARION
CRAWFORD ELK ERIE
FOREST JEFFERSON LAWRENCE
MCKEAN MERCER POTTER
VENANGO WARREN WASHINGTON

IRIS: STATION NWS / ACCEPTED 05-31 16:48/ NAME
JEST: TRACK # 21076MM/ DELIVERY 05-31 16:49/ NAME 21076MM-NWS

IRIS: STATION EXT / ACCEPTED 05-31 16:49/ NAME
JEST: TRACK # 06043II/ DELIVERY 05-31 16:49/ NAME 21076MM-NWS
THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED A TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 530 PM FOR THESE COUNTIES IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA...SOUTHERN ERIE

A TORNADO WAS SIGHTED BY STATE POLICE NEAR PENNSIDE...SOUTH OF ALBION IN ERIE COUNTY AT 505 PM...MOVING TOWARD THE NORTHEAST AT 30 MILES AN HOUR.

Note: Most clocks in Albion froze at approx. 5:05 PM
Before the NWS WSR 88-D Doppler Radar, radar operators hand drew the radar echos on overlay maps.

First tornado in the series (Rated F4)
THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED A TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 630 PM FOR THESE COUNTIES IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA ERIE AND CRAWFORD. ERIE RADAR SHOWS 3 TORNADOS ON THE GROUND ONE NORTHEAST OF WATERFORD ANOTHER NEAR CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS AND ANOTHER SOUTHWEST OF MEADVILLE. THEY ARE ALL MOVING TO THE NORTHEAST AT NEAR 35
****TORNADO WARNING Number 3***

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ERIE PA

620 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985 EXPIRES 700 PM MAY 31 1985
COUNTIES AFFECTED PA ERIE AND CRAWFORD

THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED A
TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 700 PM FOR THESE COUNTIES IN
NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHERN ERIE AND
NORTHERN CRAWFORD. AT 620 PM ERIE WEATHER RADAR
SHOWS NEW TORNADOS ON THE GROUND WEST OF ALBION
AND CONNEAUTVILLE PENNA. MOVING TOWARDS THE EAST AT
35 MPH ANOTHER TORNADO SOUTH OF SPARTANSBURG
MOVING INTO WARREN COUNTY AND ONE NORTH OF OIL CITY
MOVING INTO NORTHERN FOREST COUNTY.
Destruction Path of Albion, PA issued August, 1985
Available Technology-1985

- Radios
- Car phone (RF link via phone company)
- Pagers
- Teletypes
- Dual floppy computers
RESOLUTION NUMBER 31, 1985

A State of Emergency and Local Disaster Emergency is Declared and Governor Thornburgh Petitioned to Request Federal Relief

WHEREAS, a series of tornatoes landed in Western and Southern Erie County on the evening of May 31, 1985, killing at least 12 persons in the Albion area, injuring hundreds of people, destroying countless homes and businesses, leaving many homeless, interrupting power supplies to a wide area and causing widespread destruction of property; and

WHEREAS, the County Executive has declared a state of emergency pursuant to Article VIII, Section 9, of the Home Rule Charter for the County of Erie, as well as a local disaster emergency pursuant to the Emergency Management Services Code, the Act of November 26, 1978, P.L. 1332, No. 323 (35 Pa.C.S.A. Section 7101 et seq.), specifically Section 7501 thereof(35 Pa. C.S.A. Section 7501); and

WHEREAS, the economic and other resources required to restore and rehabilitate each affected family and business is beyond the financial capacity of Erie County government;

NOW THERE, BE IT RESOLVED by the County Council of the County of Erie that a state of emergency under the Home Rule Charter and a local disaster emergency under the Emergency Management Services Code is hereby declared.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on behalf of the hundreds of Erie County citizens who have experienced such tragic personal and material loss, we petition our Governor, Dick Thornburgh, and our respective Congressional and General Assembly that they together heed our plea and request from the Federal Government, in accordance with existing statutes, rules and regulations, all economic and other appropriate relief to which the citizens of this great and compassionate nation and state are duly entitled in the face of this disaster.

On the motion of __________ Ms. Seyfert __________, seconded by __________ Mr. Leone __________, this resolution was passed on this 1st day of __________ June __________, 1985, by a vote of __________ 6 - 0. __________

ATTEST: 

[Signature]
Corrado J. Fabrizio
County Clerk
Date __________

APPROVED BY: 

[Signature]
Judith M. Lynch
County Executive
Date __________

RECEIVED

AUG 9 1985
Erie Co. Emergency Services
HARRISBURG TO ALL COUNTY COORDINATORS
06/04/85 1545

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL DISASTER DECLARATION

THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION WAS RECEIVED FROM THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, REGION III, ON JUNE 4, 1985:


IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA. THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER IS AS FOLLOWS:

QUOTE: DEAR MR. GIUFRIDA:

I HAVE DETERMINED THAT THE DAMAGE IN CERTAIN AREAS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, RESULTING FROM SEVERE STORMS AND TORNADOES BEGINNING ON MAY 31, 1985, IS OF SUFFICIENT SEVERITY AND MAGNITUDE TO WARRANT A MAJOR-DISASTER DECLARATION UNDER PUBLIC LAW 93-208. I THEREFORE DECLARE THAT SUCH A MAJOR DISASTER EXISTS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FEDERAL ASSISTANCE, YOU ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO ALLOCATE, FROM FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR THESE PURPOSES, SUCH AMOUNTS AS YOU FIND NECESSARY FOR FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.

YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE IN THE AFFECTED AREAS. YOU ALSO ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROVIDE NECESSARY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN THE AFFECTED AREAS, ONCE AN ACCEPTABLE COMMONWEALTH COMMITMENT IS PROVIDED. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENT THAT FEDERAL ASSISTANCE BE SUPPLEMENTAL, ANY FEDERAL FUNDS PROVIDED UNDER PL 93-208 FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE WILL BE LIMITED TO 75 PERCENT OF TOTAL ELIGIBLE COSTS IN THE DESIGNATED AREA. SINCERELY, RONALD REAGAN. UNQUOTE.

MR ROBERT J. AVANCIK OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY WILL BE DESIGNATED AS THE FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER. THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (644-3618) WILL PROVIDE COORDINATION FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER. THE FEMA CONTRACT NUMBER FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER WILL BE FEMA-737-DR.

THE INCIDENT PERIOD FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN THE FEMA-STATE DISASTER ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT AS BEGINNING ON

CHA
1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- Over twenty communication centers serving the county.
- No 911, no intraoperability multiple communication networks (Lo-Band, VHF and UHF). Trunking not available at the time.
- Areas hit were the worst for radio coverage because of geography.
- Within a matter of minutes all public safety systems were overloaded.
- Unaware that other counties (and States) were hit until 12 hrs. later.
1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- 12 Fatalities, Over 140 injured required EMS transport of which over 40 (Class I Pts.) had critical injuries.
- Not one post-disaster fatality.
- Ran out of ambulances.
- Initial public safety response was impacted with debris multiple flat tires putting vehicles out of service.
1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- Lost phone service and developed message system for rescue effort.
- Amateur radio provided limited support
- Medical Teams and supplies were dispatched very early into response.
- Local government response very early into incident (Municipal and County).
- Early damage assessment provided early disaster declarations and State support.
ALBION AREA DISASTER NEWS SHEET #6 FRIDAY JUNE 7, 1985

Published daily from the Grace United Methodist Church in Albion.
Phone: 756-4407 or 756-3464. Information herein is collected each day.
Information comes from almost all agencies involved with the disaster management.

*****
If you have any helpful information to be published, get it to the Grace Church preferably before PM.
*****

If you have any helpful information to be published, get it to the Grace Church preferably before PM.

YOU CAN HELP DISPERSE this information to residents in the township by word of mouth or calling friends or relatives who may need help.

This newsletter is distributed by hand.

CURFEW--------Friday Night 9 PM to 6 AM Saturday; Entire Albion Borough Affected.

THE FEDERAL/STATE DISASTER ASSISTANCE CENTER WILL BE OPEN AT THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL from 9 AM to 6 PM Sat. Sunday, Monday (June 8, 9, 10.) All disaster victims are encouraged to go to the center to discuss available assistance.

Individual and family grants, temporary housing, amended federal tax forms, disability assistance, insurance counseling, and volunteer services will be available.

Please bring: 1. Proof of Residency (recent utility bill would do).
2. An estimate of damage or a list of damages.
3. Types of insurance, policy number and name of insurance agent. Social Security No. very helpful.

TRANSPORTATION TO DISASTER CENTER CAN BE MADE: Phone THE GRACE CHURCH at 756-4407 or 756-3464 or the Red Cross at the Junior High.

TAX REASSESSMENT FOR ALL families suffering damage should check into tax reassessment with Mr. Gecco at the JH. High Tues. (11th) 9 AM-2 PM.

ZONE PERMITS NEEDED for any major property changes. J. Bently 756-4280 after 4:30 PM.

TEMPORARY HOUSING NEEDS--contact Thelma Gunter or EJ Connors at the JH.

COMPLETE BURNING BAN IN THE BORO OF ALBION Order of fire chief and mayor.

PERISHABLE ITEMS (garbage) should be placed in dumpsters and garbage cans, NOT mixed in rubbish and scrap piles.

FOUND ITEMS REPOSITORIES are established at the Cranstonville Fire Hall and the Albion News.

MEDICAL SERVICES at the Junior High are limited to nursing care for the doctors' offices.

CHURCHES DECLARED SAFE: The Erie County Dept of Health has deemed these buildings safe for public assembly and worship services.

Assembly of God Church, South Main; Calvary United Methodist Church, 136 East Main; Parish Center ONLY St. Lawrence Church, 180 E. Pearl.

FURNITURE DONATION CAN RESUME NEXT WEEK by taking items to the fair barns Thursday, Friday, and Sat. June 13, 14, 15.

CHAINE SAW SHARPENING CENTER will be set up in the parking lot across the street from the Boro Garage on Pearl St. Sharpening of oil and mixed gas will also be available.

NEW SMALL HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCE giveaway--next Tuesday (11th) for disaster victims at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on 3rd and Spring St.

THE NORTHWESTERN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 85 SAYS THANK YOU to everyone who helped make our commencement a success. Loaned caps and gowns can be picked up at the Sr. High office before July 1st.

DONATE SCRAP ALUMINUM FOR THE NRO PARK PLAYGROUND project at Bud Endean's home on 756-3087. Women of the Moose meeting are canceled until further notice.

Counseling and Pastoral Care: pastors will be at all feeding centers during the noon and dinner hours. Appointment call 756-4407 or 756-3464.

Mental Health Services available from 9 AM to 9 PM daily at the Community Center and after 9PM call St. Vincent's Center 452-5151.

MAIL for disaster victims can be picked up at the post office after 10 AM ****TOWN MEETING**TONIGHT** 7 PM at the Senior High School!!! for ALL CITIZENS--ESPECIALLY LOSSES VICTIMS

CONTINUED ON BACK
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS MEETINGS: the AA will meet at 10266 E. Crane Road (4th house on left from Rt 108) Monday-8 PM and Friday at noon call 756-3794 or 587-6182.

MENTAL HEALTH workers will be at the DAC site from 9AM to 6PM.

VOLUNTEER WORK CREWS: in order to make effective use of your generous offer to help in the clean-up effort, PLEASE call and SCHEDULE days and times when you will be available. This will also ensure our ability to use you when you arrive at the center.

RESIDENTS: Volunteers are working and available to help you in whatever you need you may have...food, housing, clothing, etc. We will serve you...tell us WHAT YOU NEED! 756-3464 or 756-1407

The DEER is NOT shutting down the landfill until the disaster is completely over. YOUR NEEDS ARE STILL A PRIORITY ISSUE! Individuals or volunteers working for individuals may haul to the dump site. HOWEVER, private contractors will NOT pull.

Northwest Legal Services will be available for advice Saturday and Sunday 12 to 3; also Monday from 9 AM to 6 PM at the Junior High.

Red Cross Comfort Kits (razors, combs, shampoo, etc.) rolls of plastic, and free Bibles are available at the Jr. Hl...ALL SERVICES from The Red Cross are FREE. There are no charges. AND no payback is expected. Vouchers are good for 10 days.

Pennsylvania State Insurance Commission will have a representative at the DAC site.

Weekend MEDICAL Services: these will continue through the weekend at the Junior High.

The INQUIRY STATION at the Junior High has been moved from the gym to nearer the superintendent’s office.

UNINSURED Loss Victims: Members of the Christian Disaster Relief Group will be here at noon tomorrow (Saturday) to take application from any uninsured victim needing help rebuilding.

**LOST** LOST: A volunteer worker lost a brown wallet in the Abion area...call 756-3370.

CHAINSAW SHARPENING AND REPAIR—Eric Swanson will be at the Swanson’s Boat Cure Saturday (June 8).

Chainsaw sharpening service—FREE—Ed’s Garage

The laundromat is open!!!

Cafeteria service to disaster victims and volunteer workers at the following sites on Saturday and Sunday:

Junior High 6:30 AM to 9 PM

Grace Methodist Church 11 AM to 7 PM

Cranerville Fire Hall 7 AM to 9 PM

Abion Fire Hall 6:30 AM to 9 PM

To donate salvageable home furnishings, call Grace Church.

SKATING PARTY! Party sponsored by the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. JUNE 9 from 6:30 to 9 PM at King’s Roller Rink in Kingsville, Ohio. ALL are welcome to attend.

Dogs Found! White German Shepard with pink/black nose — 756-3511.

Large male back and brown mixed breed with orange collar, very friendly...756-3731

Black and white cocker spaniel...756-4702

Houses For Sale: 4 bedrooms in Abion on dead end street—756-3731

3 bedrooms, large yard, patio, gas grill, full basement—756-5461

3 bedrooms, 4 rooms, stone house, 3 1/2 acres at Little’s Corners—756-4702

4 bedroom, Market Street—756-2505

mobile home 14x70 2 bedrooms, fireplace—756-3005

Groups and individuals planning to assist at the DAC site, should register with Superintendent Andy Hilla, acting coordinator of the center.

Church Services—All churches will hold services Sunday. Note time changes.

Grace United Methodist 9:30

Cranenville United Methodist 9:30

Calvary United Methodist 11:00

Wallburg United Methodist 9:30

Assembly of God 10:45

Nazarene 10:55

St. Lawrence 8:00 and 10:00 (as well as 5:30 PM Saturday)

Holy Trinity Lutheran 10:00

ALL TIMES ARE AM except where noted.

An ecumenical worship service for all persons working through the Sunday morning hours will be held at 8:00 a.m. (for 15 minutes) on the street in front of the Abion Fire Hall.

GOD BLESS YOU ONE AND ALL! OUR AREA WILL RISE AGAIN!
The Toll of the Tornadoes on May, 31 1985

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number Killed</th>
<th>Number Injured</th>
<th>Homes Destroyed</th>
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Questions

- Nick Sleptzoff
  nicholas.sleptzoff@dhs.gov
  202-786-9641

- Tim Dunkle
  tdunkle@state.pa.us
  717-248-1115