

Area clean-up effort starts early

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Staff Writers

High winds and floodwaters Thursday hindered the repair of the damage left by Hurricane Diana, but neither stopped government officials and area residents from trying.

Chain saws whined across Southeastern North Carolina as residents tried to clear roads blocked by fallen trees.

"Tremendous, unbelievable," said Norman Tyson, Wilmington's street superintendent, as reports came in on the number of fallen trees across roads.

Forty-five city employees were busy clearing trees, a task Tyson said had top priority.

After streets are cleared, Tyson said, city crews will work on drainage problems.

Tom Larsen, deputy director of the city Public Works Department, said about 165 city employees, including 60 police officers, were helping restore order Thursday.

Many repairs had to wait until electricity resumed and winds died down.

"Power failures are the biggest problems with signal lights," said Bob Hammond, traffic operation engineer for Wilmington.

Until power is fully restored,

After streets are cleared, city crews will begin work on drainage problems.

many traffic lights will remain out of service. Police directed traffic at some major intersections Thursday where vehicles backed up at dead traffic lights.

Leland Davis, traffic service supervisor with the N.C. Department of Transportation, said state crews closed some impassable roads and detoured traffic.

He said critical signs, like stop signs, would be replaced as soon as they were reported, but other signs would have to wait until today or the beginning of next week. He said some crews would work through the night Thursday.

A signal bridge holding railroad crossing lights blew down at U.S. 17 near the N.C. 132 overpass. DOT and Seaboard System Railroad workers inspected the damage early Thursday.

Larsen said three water-pumping stations were damaged, but had been repaired.

Some area businesses were inundated with calls and buyers.

Winston Thompson of Thompson Signs and Display Inc. said repairs of broken store signs will have to wait until winds subside.

"I have no idea how many calls we've had," said Eleanor Yarborough of Yarborough Tree Service in New Hanover County. "As quick as you lay it down it rings again. We've got a lot of trees on houses and a lot of trees that are partially uprooted."

Lowe's of Wilmington opened at 2 p.m. Thursday to a lot of business.

"We just got a truckload of generators and we're selling a lot of those," said Bill Pelon, retail sales manager for the store.

Other big-selling items, he said, were chain saws, rolls of polyethylene plastic, kerosene, tape and batteries.

One of the first commercials aired Thursday by WAAV radio — which stayed on the air on emergency power overnight — advertised a portable generator rental firm.

"We rented a lot of chain saws" said Michael Davis, owner of A to Z Rental and Hardware Co. in Wilmington. "We've been out of generators for several days."

Davis said pumps for draining flooded houses also were sold out.

The store was candlelit Thursday afternoon but had telephone service.



Staff photo by Charlie Archambault

Hangar blown over

Hurricane Diana damaged three small planes

when this hangar collapsed at the Brunswick County Airport. The airfield is on the mainland near Oak Island.