

Wilkes Has Back-To-Back Stormy Days



AFTER THE STORM—Bill Miller looks over the damage caused by a storm with strong wind that whipped through Millers Creek and other parts of Wilkes County late Monday afternoon. Miller and a friend were working in the workshop behind him when it hit. The scene is behind the Miller house on Arbor Grove Church Road, near N.C. 16 North.

Large trees were toppled and power outages occurred when storms with strong wind, heavy rain, thunder and lightning and large hail hit different parts of Wilkes County Monday and Tuesday afternoon and night.

A storm that hit about 4 p.m. Monday moved in a southeasterly path, leaving the most severe damage in Millers Creek, North Wilkesboro, Hays and on through the Antioch and Somers areas.

Damage from storms Tuesday afternoon and night was more widespread but not as severe.

A Duke Energy spokesman said Wilkes County led the company's entire service area in power outages Monday with about 4,200 of the 29,000 Duke customers in Wilkes without electricity by 5:15 p.m. Only 10 Duke customers in Wilkes were without electricity by 10 a.m. Tuesday.

Chad Wayne, deputy chief of the Millers Creek Fire Department, said Millers Creek firefighters responded with chain saws to eight calls involving downed trees from as far south as the Green Acres subdivision to as far north as Mountain Valley Church Road between 4 and 6:30 p.m. Monday.

The worst damage in Millers Creek occurred when four large white pines were blown down in Lloyd Miller's backyard off Arbor Grove Church Road. One pine fell on a workshop behind Miller's house and another on a neighbor Josh Beshears' storage building.

Miller's son, Bill Miller, and Ricky Dancy were working in the workshop when the storm hit about 4 p.m. Monday. This was about an hour after electricity in the area was lost, apparently due to lightning.

When hard winds started, said Bill Miller, "I told him (Dancy) that we were safer just to stay inside." Miller said they got down as low as possible and he was "kissing cement" when they heard and felt the white pine hitting the roof of the workshop directly above them.

When the wind eased after about 15 minutes, said Miller, he and Dancy left the workshop, with a hole in its roof, and ran across a yard littered with marble-size hail to the Miller house.

Others on Arbor Grove Church Road said it was the hardest wind they ever experienced and one woman said she just got in the bed and pulled the covers over her head until it was over.

A Ford Explorer parked near another house on Arbor Grove Church Road and fences elsewhere were damaged when trees were blown over.

North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby said his firefighters responded with chain saws to seven calls about downed trees on power lines and roadways within about 30 minutes starting a little after 4 p.m. Monday. Hamby said Knotville firefighters assisted.

He said one tree hit the edge of the roof of Mrs. Blair Yale's home in the Finley Park neighborhood. Hamby said a report about a woman being trapped by a tree on her house on Pine Street wasn't true because firefighters found her outside the house.

Hamby said the rain gauge at the North Wilkesboro Water Treatment Plant measured 1½ inches of rain in about 30 minutes late Monday afternoon.

A large tree was blown over on the property of First Baptist Church of North Wilkesboro and much of an old hemlock tree in the front yard of the Hubbard-Hemphill house on Main Street, Wilkesboro, was blown down.

Brian Hamby, district maintenance engineer for the N.C. Department of Transportation, said five DOT crews of three or four men per crew responded with chain saws to about 20 reports of trees on roadways within about an hour starting about 4:30 p.m. Monday afternoon. DOT personnel worked until about 8 p.m. Monday.

He said DOT crews dealt with a similar situation late Tuesday afternoon and night, except they responded to about 30 reports of trees on roadways. Hamby said the first wave of storm damage was in northeastern Wilkes starting about 4:30 p.m.

Reports of fallen trees and downed power lines in the Hays, Traphill, Austin and Thurmond areas started coming in about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

At North Wilkes High School Tuesday, car riders and the second load of bus riders weren't allowed to leave until 4:25 p.m. Tuesday due to a tornado watch in effect at the time. No tornado was actually spotted.

Hail reportedly about the size of golf balls damaged newly-planted tobacco in northeastern Wilkes.

Emergency personnel responded to a report of a tree on a mobile home in the Roaring Gap Church Road area about 8:30 p.m. and found that the tree fell near but not on the structure.

The second wave started later that evening in the Maple Springs area of western Wilkes and then moved eastward through Millers Creek and east of the Wilkesboros.

About 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Roaring River, Knotville and Mountain View firefighters responded to a house fire on N.C. 268 East in the Roaring River district. Hamby, as Wilkes fire investigator, also responded.

The fire in the one-story frame house apparently started from a TV cord shorting out and overheating, said Hamby. Although fire was contained to one room of the house, he said, there was smoke and water damage elsewhere.