



COLBY FREE PRESS



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Sky scare

Winds up to 99 mph roll through Colby area

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Wednesday night's weather event, that brought winds up to 99 mph into the Colby area, seemed to have taken everyone by surprise.

Wind speeds shot up from 15 mph to 99 in less than three minutes prior to 8 p.m., leaving behind busted car windows and signs, downed power lines, tree branches across roads and even one business reporting damage in excess of \$50,000.

Before most people even knew what hit them, the major gusts were already diminishing, but in that short span of time a lot of havoc resulted, according to officials.

Wayne Wiens, technology lab teacher who also oversees the Colby High School weather station, said that about 7:55 p.m., winds were at 15 to 17 mph. Then right before 8 p.m., gusts spiked to 99. Within about a minute after the near 100 mph winds came, the gusts fell to 91 and at 8:05 p.m., were at 75, then down to 50 mph at 8:10 and dropped slightly to 45 by 8:15 p.m., Wiens said. After 8:15 p.m., wind speeds stayed in the upper 30s.

The strong winds also brought with it clouds of dirt, dropping visibility to less than a block in and out of town. One I-70 motorist said conditions were such that he ended up going off the roadway.

One hard hit area was north of Colby with one local business, Straight Line, specializing in truss manufacturing, sustaining \$50,000 plus damage from "straight line" winds, as they were described by the National Weather Service at Goodland.

According to Bill Olsen, owner, a 50' x 80' secondary storage building was destroyed when the roof came off and hit a 12' x 16' log cabin on display nearby.

Debris from the roof and log cabin spread across K-25, eight miles north of Colby, Olsen said.

"It looked like somebody had taken the (secondary) building and threw it on the log cabin," he said today.

According to Olsen, he was later told by a representative from the Goodland National Weather Service Office that while the winds were clocked at 99 mph, it was probably even higher com-

ing through the draw where his business is located.

Chris Bieker, Thomas County roads supervisor, said a window on a mower tractor that was parked in Levant was blown out.

"I've only been able to cover the north half of the county so far," he said, "and we've seen signs down north of Gem and maybe five or six power poles snapped north of Colby."

One sign on Interstate 70 about a mile from the Levant exit was "curved" over rather than bent, which one resident said was quite odd.

The hardest hit area within the city, according to Gerry Bieker, public works director, was at Third Street and Garfield when half of a tree fell over the roadway.

"We had five employees out with chain saws and loaders to get the tree limbs off the roads," Bieker said. In total, most of the work was completed in about an hour.

Along with downed trees and signs, officials reported that cars parked at Dillons and Montana Mike's also had windows broken.

One unofficial source heard that cars facing north in the Dillon's parking lot all had driver's side windows busted out. In checking with various insurance companies, reports of fences, shingles and car damage were confirmed in Wednesday night's storm.

Corky Delzeit, director of public power, said that the north-central part of the city lost power for about one hour after a huge tree limb tripped the circuit in that area.

"The majority of damage we saw," Delzeit said, "was from trees and most other outages reported came from individual residents who said limbs had fallen on their power lines."

Power in the north-central part of Colby was restored by 8:55 p.m., he said.

The fortunate aspect of the evening's sky scare was no reports of injuries.

Weather watches and warnings dotted the television screens early in the evening, but the severity of the event in the immediate Colby area seemingly caught a lot of people off guard.

The forecast through the weekend calls for much calmer conditions, with warming temperatures.

Bush to end bombing

GOTEBORG, Sweden (AP) — President Bush said Thursday the Navy will end its bombing exercises on Vieques Island off the coast of Puerto Rico.

"These are our friends and neighbors and they don't want us there," Bush said at a news conference in Goteborg, Sweden, during a European Union gathering.

"My attitude is the Navy ought find somewhere else to conduct its exercises," Bush said.

Officials said the exercises will end as early as May 2003.

The Pentagon was also expected to announce the establishment of a panel to look for an alternative to what the Navy has called the "crown jewel" of its Atlantic training sites.

Pulling out of Vieques is a reversal for the Navy, which has used its range on the island for six decades and has said repeatedly that the site is vital to national security. Critics say the bombing poses a health threat to the island's 9,100 residents, which the Navy denies. Earlier, a Defense Department of-

ficial said on condition of "anonymity" that Navy Secretary Gordon England recommended to Bush that planning begin for an end to the bombing within two years. He said Navy officials wanted to make the decision public because they felt the situation was growing more volatile.

Officials said England can't promise a place will be found within two years, but hopes it can.

The Navy owns two-thirds of Vieques and its bombing range covers 900 acres — less than 3 percent of the island. It used live bombs until two went astray in a 1999 practice and killed a civilian guard on the bombing range, igniting protests and calls for the military to leave. It since has used dummy bombs. About 75 protesters demonstrated peacefully outside Camp Garcia's gates on Vieques on Wednesday as a fresh round of Navy exercises began offshore.

In earlier demonstrations in April and May, 180 people were arrested on trespassing charges during previous bombing exercises.

High winds associated with a strong storm system moving north of town came through Colby around 8 p.m. Wednesday. **ABOVE:** Rob Stithem with Earthworks, inspects the damage to a large tree in the back yard of Pete and Connie Peterson, 655 N. Woofter. **BELOW:** Windblown debris blew out this window in an unoccupied apartment at Amber Waves Apartments on South Franklin.



Injury accident



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

This 2000 Suburban was destroyed when the driver, 15-year-old David Erker, Ft. Morgan, Colo. lost control and rolled the vehicle about 1/4 mile north of the Colby Municipal Airport on K-25 Wednesday. Erker told sheriff's deputies that he fell asleep and the front tire dropped off the pavement. He tried to overcorrect and rolled the vehicle. His stepmother, 42-year-old Rhonda Erker and stepsister, 10-year-old Sydney L'Heureux, who were not wearing seatbelts, were ejected from the car. His stepsister Dawnelle, 12, and father Michael, 48, were also injured in the wreck. L'Heureux and her daughters were flown to Swedish Medical Center in Denver in critical condition. Erker and his father were flown to Ft. Morgan by private plane later that evening. The Thomas County Sheriff and Emergency Medical Services, Kansas Highway Patrol and Colby Police and Fire Departments all assisted in the accident.



Briefly

Weather: Warmer

A return to more June-like temperatures are forecast for the Colby area by the National Weather Service. Tonight, expect a low in the 40s, clear skies and west winds to around 10 mph. Friday, mostly sunny, high 80-85 and west winds 5-15 mph. Friday night, clear, low 50-55. Saturday and Sunday, partly cloudy, low 55-65 and the high 85-95. Wednesday's high in Colby was 83 and the overnight low this morning was 46, not too far off the record low for the date of 40 degrees set in 1969.

The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 79 degrees. There was no additional precipitation, leaving the month's total at 0.09 inches. The records for June 14: 103 in 1952 and 40 in 1969. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Taxes due next week

Thomas County Treasurer Donita Applebury said today that the second half of the 2000 property taxes are due in the treasurer's office by Wednesday, June 20. For information or questions, call 462-4520.

Fair board meets tonight

The Thomas County Free Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. today at the 4-H building. Fair plans and any other business matters needing attention will be taken up. The fair will be July 30-Aug. 3. The meeting is open to the public.

Book sale starts Saturday

Pioneer Memorial Library's annual used book sale will begin on Saturday, June 16 and conclude on Saturday, June 23. Prices will vary from full price on June 16 through June 18; then 1/2 price on June 19 and 20; \$4 a box or bag-full on the June 21 and 22; and end with \$3 a box or bag-full on Saturday, June 23, said JoAnne Sunderman, librarian. Prices will range from \$5 to 10-cents and there will be selected items such as older encyclopedia sets available for bid. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to get some great buys. All proceeds will go to the library for the purchase of new books and other materials, and also special

programming. For information, call 462-4470.

Race lunchers needed

The Great Race is coming to Colby, and subsequently the Convention and Visitors Bureau's Director Lelani Thomas needs volunteers to host a driver and navigator for lunch. The event will feature antique cars and trucks in a precision race across the United States. Events will begin at 11:15 Saturday, June 23. Cost for the luncheon is \$30 and is on a first come first serve basis. For more information, call Thomas at 462-3401

Giggles await children

Thad Beach, children's musician and songwriter, will present *From Kalamazoo to Catfish County...* at 9:30 a.m. Friday, at Pioneer Memorial Library in Colby. Children of all ages are invited to "come and fill your tank with gallons of giggles as you travel with Thad Beach all the way from Kalamazoo to Catfish County with a stop at the Polka-Dot Cafe. Sing-along, hear tall tales from Catfish County and play homemade folk instruments." The program is sponsored by The Friends of Pioneer Memorial Library.

Bowhunters shoot Sunday

The Northwest Kansas Bowhunters Club will hold an archery shoot beginning at 1 p.m., Sunday, at the archery range, located north of Fike Park in Colby.

The shoot is open to everyone and, according to Robb Ross, one of the organizers, participants do not need to be members. For information, call 462-6318.

Foodstuff still available

USDA commodities are still available at the Colby Senior Progress Center, according to officials.

If you missed either the May or June distribution, you are eligible to receive them. Please call 462-6744 to make arrangements for pickup.

Free compost available

The Thomas County landfill has compost to give away free to whoever will come and get it. If there are any questions, call Larry Jumper, landfill director, at 462-8139.

