

Destructive storm hits Colby, Thomas County



MARVIN AND LUETTA ERWIN of Colby worked most of Sunday cleaning up after a severe thunderstorm that hit the area from the north. Mrs. Erwin said the spruce tree in front of their home was blown over and new fencing and a terrace

that the couple had put up was damaged. The pounding north winds stripped the paint right off the outside walls of the house. The Erwins had help removing the tree and larger branches. They said they were sad to lose their only shade tree.

There was nothing subtle about a thunderstorm that hit Thomas County and Colby early Sunday morning.

Power outages, downed electrical lines, trees uprooted, flooding and lots of debris played major havoc within the city, said Gerry Bieker, public works director for Colby.

More than 20 homes had lines pulled down, resulting in power outages, and others were without power when a transformer bracket broke and fuses blew, he said.

The majority of homes with lines down were in the older part of the city, which has overhead power poles, Mr. Bieker said.

"The majority of the line crew started working after the storm ended at about 2 a.m.," Mr. Bieker said, "and worked until just before 6 p.m. on Sunday night."

Then in the midst of getting power back, a water main broke. It was unrelated to the storm, but crews worked from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. getting it repaired.

Fike Park downtown was flooded when the drains got plugged up from debris, he said.

Along with trees uprooted and power outages, Mr. Bieker also said that many of the three-board barricades blocking streets along Fourth were mangled by the high winds.

The city continued cleanup Monday, chopping the larger branches that people had hauled to the curbs near their homes.

"It should also be noted," he said,

"that everywhere in the city did a really nice job of cleaning up debris."

From the Goodland office, Trent Smith, an intern meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said a storm warning for Thomas County was issued at 12:52 a.m. and the first report came in at 12:58 a.m. The majority came in between 1:05 to 1:10 a.m.

Mr. Smith said wind gusts of 83 and 85 mph were reported shortly after 1 a.m. and reports of golf ball-sized hail came in about the same time.

"We did have a report three miles east of Colby that got three inches of rain," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Bieker added that he heard reports of 1.5 inches of rain on the west edge of town, with higher totals further east. Near downtown, one family reported 2.5 inches.

Mr. Smith said the only damage the weather service heard of was many tree branches were down and a tree that fell on a car.

"There was nothing unusual about it," he said. "It was just a High Plains thunderstorm."

He said the weather service hasn't received any other reports from Colby and most of them came from the community itself.

Smith also said the storm moved at about 35 mph and also did damage in the Oakley area, which received .93 inches of rain west of town and almost an inch and a half on a farm 26 miles south.

Shooting in Levant suicide attempt

A shooting at Levant, west of Colby, last Wednesday night apparently was a suicide attempt, sheriff's officers said.

Thomas County Undersheriff Mike Baughn said his department received a call about a shooting at 6:48 p.m. The department, along with the KBI, investigated.

Baughn said 33-year-old Dusty Nudson of Levant apparently shot himself in the head with a 9 mm pistol.

Nudson was found in the backyard of an unoccupied residence on Main Street, near his home.

"There was nothing as far as a domestic report or anything," Baughn said, adding that there might have been an argument going on for some time, but officers were not sure.

He said Nudson was probably air-

lifted elsewhere for treatment but didn't know where. "We haven't been able to contact any family to find out," he said. "His condition is unknown. I'm just not sure where to find out."

Calls were made to Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center in Denver, Via Christi Medical Center in

Wichita and Hays Medical Center. All three said they did not have Nudson listed as a patient.

Gwen Young, spokesperson at Citizens Medical Center in Colby, would only say that Nudson was treated and transferred, but declined to give a destination.

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