

April 2011 Tornadoes: Lives Saved, Business Disruption Avoided

Once every forty or fifty years, Mother Nature brings together the ingredients for a truly horrendous outbreak of tornadoes in the southern United States. This occurred in 1884, 1936, 1974, and has now occurred on April 27, 2011. It is still too soon to know exactly how many tornadoes occurred and their exact strength. That will be studied over the next few months. In the meantime, we wish to report on our efforts to keep our clients informed and safe.

During the four-day period from Sunday, April 24 through Wednesday, April 27, we issued more than 3,200 warnings and warning-related messages to our clients. That is a record. These went to railroads, manufacturers, corporate campuses, data centers, and government facilities. It would be impossible to provide a report on every one of these events, so let us look at three representative examples:

Government Medical Facility, Smithville, Mississippi.

Per its operating instructions to AccuWeather, the hospital wishes to receive twenty minutes of advance notice of an approaching tornado. This time interval is sufficient to move patients and staff away from vulnerable areas while minimizing the disruption of patient care and the discomfort (to the patients) of being in hallways and other shelter. AccuWeather provided over twenty minutes of advance warning of the F-5 tornado. The tornado emergency plan was activated and, even though there was major damage to the facility, there were no injuries.

SunTrust Bank, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

SunTrust relies on SkyGuard to insure its people and systems receive maximum protection any time a tornado comes within a three-mile radius of its facility (due to the potential for power surges even if the tornado does not directly strike their location). SunTrust has specified twenty minutes of preparation time (the interval between the issuance of the warning and the arrival of the storm) so the tornado's effects can be mitigated. At 8:28pm, AccuWeather issued a tornado warning valid from 8:50 until 9:20pm. A governmental tornado warning was not available until nine precious minutes later. Relying solely on the governmental warning would have cost SunTrust 41% of its valuable preparation time. The tornado passed within 2.4 miles of the SunTrust office at 8:59pm. There were no injuries or damage at the SunTrust facility.



While safety is the overarching goal of our SkyGuard® service, another important goal of the service is to allow companies to continue to operate when no threat exists to their specific location. This can be difficult to determine when relying only on overly broad governmental storm warnings intended for the public at large. The pinpoint SkyGuard service, by contrast, advises enterprises on whether a particular severe weather event will affect their exact location. Here is an example of how that goal was achieved during the recent tornado outbreak.

General Electric, Huntsville, Alabama.

With tornadoes occurring in the Northern Alabama region, the National Weather Service issued a public warning for a large area. However, our site-specific notification to our client, General Electric, advised them that they would not be affected. This eliminated what would have been 28 minutes of unnecessary downtime and sheltering.

One of the unique and challenging aspects of this tornado outbreak was the morning thunderstorms that caused more than 1.2 million people to lose power in northern Mississippi, northern Alabama, and southeast Tennessee. According to media reports, a number of radio and television stations' weather broadcasts were disrupted, as were emergency services. This highlights an advantage of receiving warnings from a source outside the region affected. AccuWeather has redundant storm warning facilities in Wichita, Kansas, and State College, Pennsylvania.

These are just three of the thousands of stories from this historic outbreak of tornadoes. Contact AccuWeather Enterprise Solutions to learn more. The sooner you call, the faster you can protect your people, your assets, and your profits. After all, the next storm may already be on the way.



Photos courtesy David Mabe.

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