

Microburst Hits Browns Mills

75 MPH Wind Gusts Knock Down 12 Utility Poles; Force Town Center to Shut Down



PHOTO BY TOM WALKER

Twelve utility poles were downed by a microburst in Browns Mills on June 24.

By Douglas D. Melegari
Staff Writer

BROWNS MILLS—The National Weather Service (NWS) has confirmed that a severe thunderstorm produced a microburst in the Browns Mills section of Pemberton Township on Saturday, June 24.

Meteorologists from the local NWS office conducted a storm survey in the Burlington County municipality after the storm caused extensive damage to utility infrastructure.

The path of damage from the microburst began on Crescent Drive with several downed trees and power lines. The damage then extended southeast onto Trenton Road where multiple utility poles were downed.

Sporadic damage also occurred on Broadway and Pear Avenue. Damage was also noted on either side of Mirror Lake.

"The path of damage was a little over a mile

long," said Sarah Johnson, a lead forecaster with the local National Weather Service office in Mount Holly. "It was as wide as one-third of a mile."

Meteorologists believe maximum wind gusts neared 75 mph during the peak of the microburst which began at about 7:05 a.m.

"Several signs pointed to the damage being caused by straight-line winds," said the NWS in a statement. "All the trees were pointed to the southeast as the wind came in from the west and northwest. Also, the damage was concentrated at first, but then spanned outward from a path in both directions—typical of a microburst."

A microburst is a convective downdraft with an affected outflow area of less than 2 1/2 miles wide and peak winds lasting less than five minutes. Microbursts may induce dangerous horizontal and vertical wind shears, which can adversely affect aircraft performance and cause

property damage.

"Straight-line winds are generally any wind that is not associated with rotation, used mainly to differentiate them from tornadic winds," Johnson said. "I'd like to emphasize that straight-line winds can cause just as much damage and be just as dangerous as a tornado."

The thunderstorm responsible for the microburst was associated with a cold front that had absorbed the remnants of Tropical Storm Cindy, which made landfall in southwestern Louisiana on Thursday, June 22.

Showers and thunderstorms associated with the cold front and remnants of Cindy had weakened considerably early on Saturday morning while crossing the Appalachian Mountains. At 4:30 a.m., very little lightning was detected on radar.

By 6:30 a.m., the situation changed as the remnant moisture moved into New Jersey.

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"It was a very quickly evolving line of showers with a few thunderstorms that intensified as it moved towards our Coastal Plain," Johnson said. "It came off the higher terrain and intensified—we have to do further research and look at the data to see why it did so."

Jersey Central Power and Light arrived on Saturday morning to assess the storm damage and restore power. At first, 60 customers were without service. By noon, the number increased to 1,544 customers as the utility removed damaged equipment from service and began making repairs. By 6 p.m., only 40 customers remained without service.

Power was fully restored to affected customers on Sunday afternoon. The utility is continuing to assess the cost of repairs.

"It is confirmed that 12 poles were downed by the storm on Trenton Road," said Christy Hajoway, a spokeswoman for Jersey Central Power and Light.

Pemberton Township Fire Chief and

Emergency Management Coordinator Craig Augustoni said that Jersey Central Power and Light had made "unbelievable" progress.

He said officials first learned of the storm damage after receiving a call that there had been a car accident at the intersection of Trenton Road and Broadway.

"The accident turned out to be the storm event," Augustoni said. "The first call came in just after 7 a.m."

A car traveling on Trenton Road was struck by the utility equipment that fell and had its rear window shattered.

Emergency crews also had to rescue a man who was trapped in a pickup truck surrounded by downed wires near the intersection of Trenton Road and Broadway.

"The wires trapped the guy," Augustoni said.

Hajoway said that the company's electrical system is built to withstand severe weather; but sometimes extreme weather conditions will create damage.

"When the wind reaches a certain miles per hour and there is heavy rain, there is a breaking point and a perfect storm ensues," she said.

The number and location of the fallen utility poles limited access in and out of Browns Mills.

Trenton Road, between Lakehurst Road and Pine Mill; Broadway, between Trenton Road and Pear Avenue; and Pemberton-Browns Mills Road, between Market Street and Trenton Road, were closed to through traffic. The portions of the roads closed contain two residences, an apartment complex and several businesses.

Augustoni said Jersey Central Power and Light quickly cleared the way for residents to safely get to and from their homes in the affected areas.

Multiple churches in Browns Mills canceled their services for both Saturday and Sunday. The Pemberton Volunteer Fire Department Bingo was postponed.

Augustoni said that besides extensive utility pole damage and downed trees, his office received no reports of structural damage in the township. Property damage was minimal.

"We had one tree on N. Lakeshore Drive which uprooted and ripped out a gas main," he said.

Augustoni activated the township's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during the daylight hours of Saturday. Two fire police strike teams from the county were dispatched to the township to help with traffic control.

However, he said that an emergency declaration was not signed or needed.

No injuries or fatalities were reported as a result of the microburst.

"The storm damage in the township was isolated to the section of Browns Mills," he said. "We heard from people in the northeast corner of the township that they hardly got any rain."

Pockets of storm damage also occurred in other parts of our coverage area.

In Medford Township, crews removed several trees that fell on private properties alongside Allen Avenue. One tree fell on a house, causing damage to its roof.

"It was some minor structural damage to the roof of the garage," said Lt. Robert Dovi, Jr., Medford's emergency management coordinator.

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There was also tree damage at the Milton H. Allen Elementary School.

In Shamong Township, fallen trees and large branches blocked Three Bridge Road along with a few private driveways.

In Southampton Township, a few trees and branches fell down near the intersection of Picardy Way and Kingston Way in the LeisureTowne retirement community. One home sustained shingle and siding damage.

In Washington Township, a cinder block building on the Lee Brothers, Inc. cranberry farm sustained structural damage.

"The storm ripped a whole portion of the roof back and it collapsed along with a concrete wall onto a dump truck," said Steve Lee IV, who co-owns the farm. "It damaged the dump truck."

Johnson said there was a lot of straight-line wind damage that was reported across the area.

The NWS issued two tornado warnings and a couple of severe thunderstorm warnings for the state as the weather system swept through.

Another storm survey conducted by the NWS confirmed that two tornadoes touched down in Howell.

One of the tornadoes was captured on video, touching down near a Home Depot store, resulting in flying debris and power flashes.

Saturday's round of severe thunderstorms was the second to impact the area in less than a week.

On June 21, a complex of storms downed trees and wires throughout Tabernacle and Southampton townships.

Issac Budd Road in Southampton was closed for more than 12 hours while crews removed a large tree and a downed pole. The utility pole was replaced.

Saturday, July 1, 2017

PINE BARRENS TRIBUNE, WWW



PINE BARRENS TRIBUNE **OPINION**

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Editorial

Make Fourth of July a Patriotic One

Independence Day or 4th of July remains an important national holiday and a symbol of patriotism.

241 years ago, the Declaration of Independence was adopted. During this holiday weekend, celebrate our

nation's birthday in style.

Fireworks, parades, barbecues, carnivals, fairs, picnics, concerts, baseball games, family reunions, and watching historical reenactments are just some of the ways you can celebrate independence.

Sincere Gratitude to Those Who Cleaned Up After the Storm

This past weekend's severe weather episode served as a stark reminder that no two storms are alike and we should all be prepared for the power to go out.

The men of women of the Pemberton Township Police Department, Fire Department and Public Works Department should be commended for their hard work during this past weekend's storm recovery—along with the countless volunteers and neighbors who pitched in

to clean up the damage and checked on the vulnerable populations.

Thankfully, no injuries or fatalities were reported.

Jersey Central Power and Light should also be commended for replacing twelve utility poles downed on Trenton Road within 24 hours. Readers may not be aware of this—but it usually takes a utility crew three to six hours to replace just one pole.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

E-mail us: letters@pinebarrenstribune.com

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PHOTO BY TOM WALKER

Transformers were destroyed by the damaging winds.



PHOTO BY TOM WALKER

Residents and business owners from Browns Mills assess damage.





A fallen tree blocks Pear Avenue.

PHOTO BY TOM WALKER



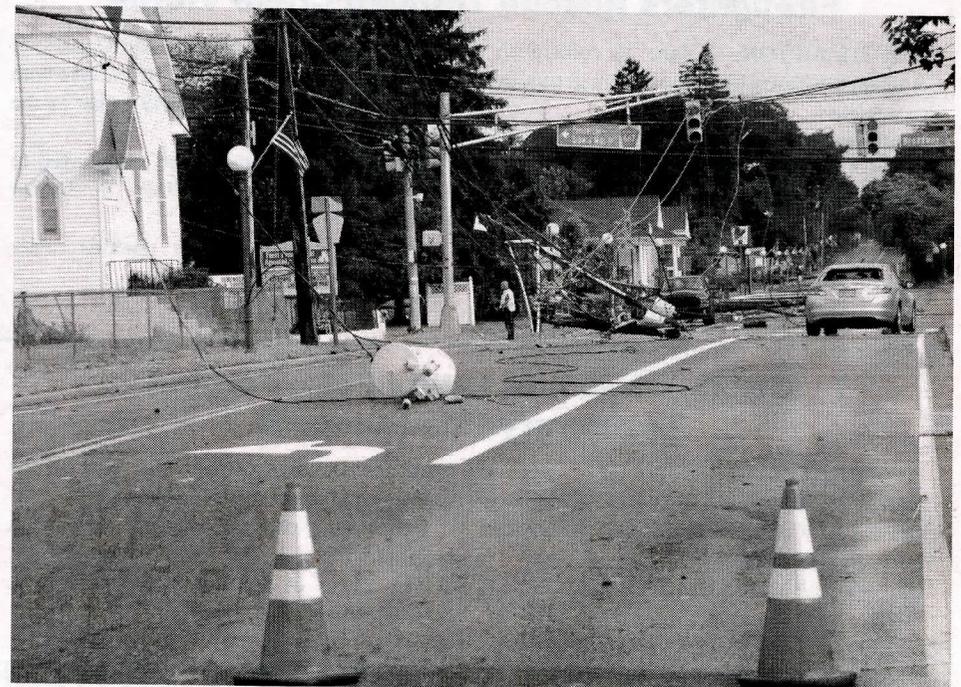
Police prevent motorists from traveling down Trenton Road due to fallen utility poles.

PHOTO BY TOM WALKER



A man became trapped in his pick-up truck after downed wires surrounded it.

PHOTO BY TOM WALKER



A transformer lies in Trenton Road turning lane.

PHOTO BY TOM WALKER