

Major storm in northwest Europe kills at least 16

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USPA News - At least 16 people were killed Monday, including seven in Germany and five in Britain, when a powerful storm battered northwestern Europe, officials and meteorologists said. Deaths were also reported in France, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The intense low pressure system began to affect parts of Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands on late Sunday afternoon as it continued to strengthen. It moved northeastwards, across England and Wales, on Monday morning before moving to the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. "The storm developed as expected just off to the southwest of the UK last night, before tracking up into the Bristol Channel in the early hours of the morning," forecasters at UK's Met Office said. "It then tracked across the Midlands, moving off into the North Sea just to the north of East Anglia later in the morning." As the storm moved across southern England and Wales, it brought heavy rain and very strong winds that caused widespread damage. The strongest winds in Britain were on the Isle of Wight where wind gusts of 159 kilometers (99 miles) per hour were recorded, and wind gusts in Greater London reached 111 kilometers (69 miles) per hour. But even before the worst of the storm hit Britain, emergency services were called to a beach in East Essex on Sunday afternoon when a 14-year-old boy was swept out to sea while playing in the surf. There was still no sign of the boy by late Monday, but he remained listed as missing because the search had not yet been called off. As the storm moved across southern England on early Monday morning, a 51-year-old man was killed at 6:50 a.m. in a town about 23 kilometers (14 miles) northwest of central London when a tree fell on his car. About 20 minutes later, a 17-year-old girl was killed in Kent when a tree fell onto the caravan she was sleeping in. Soon after, at approximately 7:33 a.m. local time, a man and a woman were killed in the London borough of Hounslow when a major gas explosion caused three houses to collapse and damaged two others. Investigators said the blast was caused by a ruptured gas main, possibly the result of a tree that fell just before 7 a.m. "Three houses were completely destroyed in the blast, debris was scattered over an area of about 50 meters (164 feet), and the roof of one of the houses was in a tree across the road," said London Fire Brigade Station Manager Matt Burrows. "Highly trained search and rescue crews searched through the rubble with sniffer dogs, and sadly two people were found dead." Five people and three dogs escaped safely from the affected properties before firefighters arrived at the scene, and a man and two women were taken to hospital by the London Ambulance Service. The man and one woman were treated for cuts to their faces and were later released, while the second woman was treated for burns to her hand. Approximately 25 people were evacuated from surrounding properties as a precaution, and firefighters were able to rescue a dog from one of the houses. "It's been a busy and challenging day for our firefighters, officers, and control officers but all have performed admirably," London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson said. But most of the deaths were reported in northern Germany, where the strong winds brought down trees, ripped off roofs, grounded flights and halted trains. Among the country's seven deaths are a mother and her child whom were killed near the city of Gelsenkirchen in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia when a tree fell on their car. Two other children were injured, one of them seriously. Two deaths were reported in the Netherlands, where the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) described it as the country's worst storm since the Burns' Day Storm in January 1990. One of the deaths was reported in the capital Amsterdam, where a woman was killed by a tree and four people were injured by a falling fence. "The storm was forecast but we saw today that the forces of nature are unpredictable," Amsterdam Mayor Eberhard van der Laan said. "The emergency services are busy to normalize everyday life in the city as soon as possible. I will express my sympathy to the family of the victim of the unfortunate accident." One person was killed in Denmark, where meteorologists recorded a wind gust of 194.4 kilometers (120.8 miles) per hour, making it the strongest wind gust ever recorded in the country. A death was also reported on the French island of Belle Île off the coast of Brittany in northwestern France, where a middle-aged woman was swept into the sea by a large wave.

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