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FEATURED

Tornado strikes Salado area, damaging homes; hail pelts Belton, Temple, Killeen

BY ERIC E. GARCIA | TELEGRAM CITY EDITOR
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A tornado near Salado was photographed on the ground by a storm spotter.

Courtesy | Will Leverett via Twitter

A tornado of “significant strength” touched down Tuesday evening in the Salado area, leading to a rescue operation as several homes were damaged or destroyed, officials said.

The tornado swept into Bell County, producing hail and strong winds, after it was spotted in the Florence area of Williamson County at about 5:30 p.m. Tuesday night. Hail up to grapefruit sized was shown in photographs on social media.

National Weather Service meteorologist Madison Gordon confirmed a tornado of “significant strength” struck near the village of Salado shortly after 6 p.m. Tuesday evening.

The actual strength of the tornado could not be immediately determined as a preliminary investigation by the weather service will gauge the intensity and damage from the tornado, Gordon said.

“We did see a significant velocity signature,” she said.

Storm spotters on social media showed photos and video of a large wide storm with a tornado that funneled towards the ground. People spotted the tornado throughout Central Texas.

TJ Cruz, chief deputy of the Bell County Sheriff’s Department, said deputies were assisting in rescue operations Tuesday night as several homes in the area were damaged or destroyed. Damaged homes had significant roof damage and debris was scattered across the area, he said.

“We’re all over Salado right now,” Cruz said Tuesday night.

Homes damaged in the Salado area were located off FM 2484 near Buttermilk Creek. Damage was also reported on Hidden Springs Drive to the west of the creek.

Michael Coggin, Salado mayor, said many homes will need to be repaired.

“It’s gonna be a lot of roofs that will need to be repaired,” Coggin said.

Coggin said the Youngsport area of Bell County was also hit hard.

Cruz did not have immediate reports of injuries.

At the beginning of severe storm activity, the National Weather Service in Fort Worth issued a tornado warning for parts of Coryell County.

Reports indicated that a tornado touched down in Fort Hood training areas. The warned area was near Flat and briefly in the Gatesville area.

Facebook users on the Copperas Cove Hot Topics page posted that traffic on North Farm-to-Market 116 toward Gatesville was at a standstill as the storm moved through.

Texas Department of Public Safety troopers said many roads around Salado were shut down. Authorities were going house to house to check on residents.

Belton and Temple received significant rainfall from the storm, but no damage was immediately reported.

Golf-ball sized hail was reported near the Bell County Expo Center in Belton while pea-sized hail fell in downtown Temple.

In the Killeen area, multiple rounds of hail pelted the area, producing hail in various sizes ranging from pea- or marble-sized hail to as big as around golfball-sized hail.

A storm spotter said a minor tornado was also reported Tuesday night in the Seaton area just east of Temple.

Flash flood warnings were issued Tuesday night for Belton and other parts of Bell County.

As of around 7:45 p.m. Tuesday, the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport had reported rainfall amounts of 0.61 inches. Temple's Draughon-Miller Central Texas Regional Airport had reported 0.21 inches.

More rain was expected Tuesday night into Wednesday morning, the weather service said.

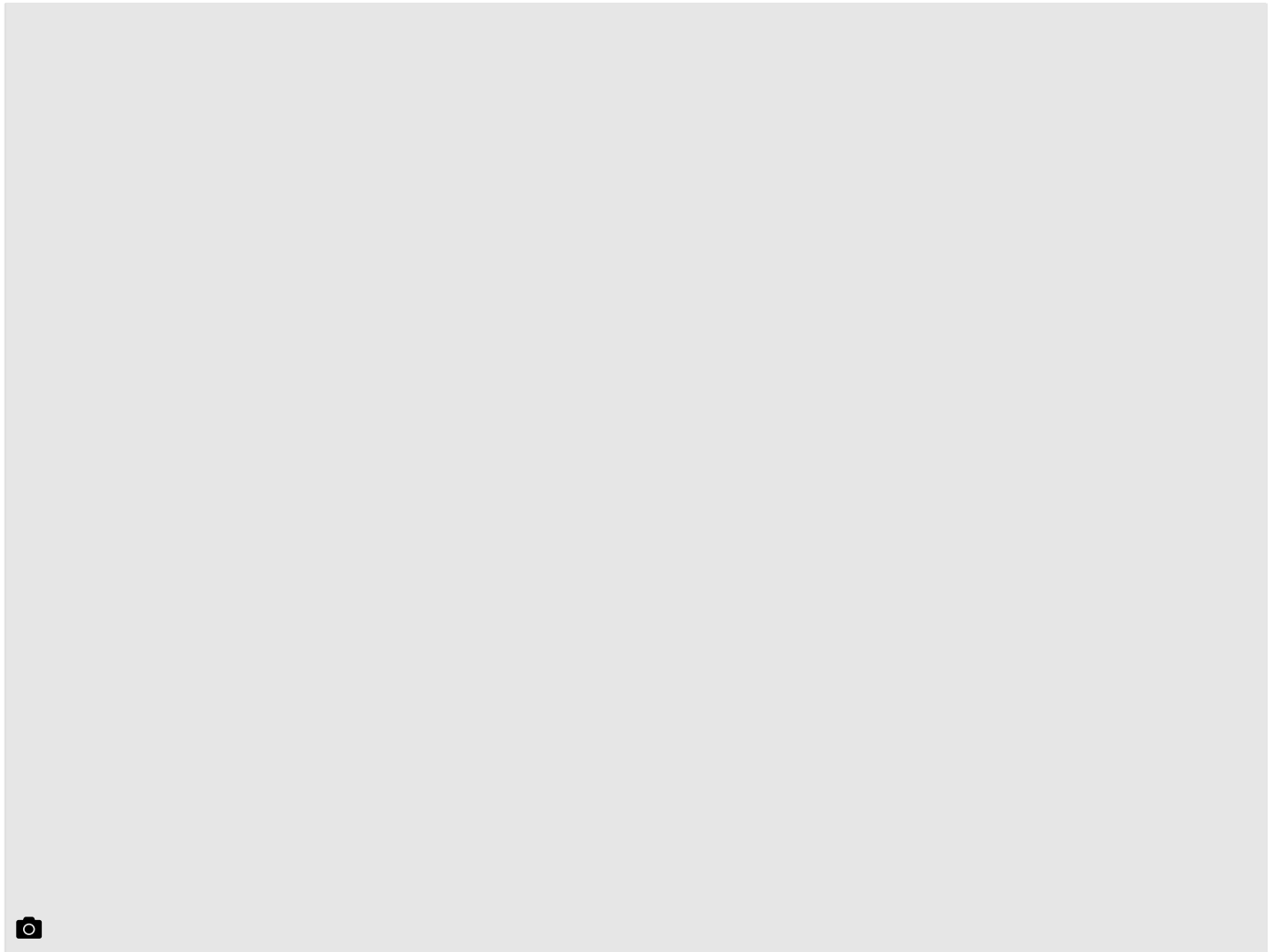
"New precipitation amounts between a tenth and quarter of an inch, except higher amounts possible in thunderstorms," the agency said.

More severe storms are forecast before 10 a.m. Wednesday as a 30% chance of precipitation is expected.

Skies will be mostly cloudy Wednesday morning before gradually clearing. Gusty winds could reach up to 30 mph. The high temperature is expected near 88 while the low will be around 50.

FME News Service contributed to this report.

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Telegram City Editor