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Touch down

PHOTO

By Brady Delander | Staff Writer | June 11, 2009 11:48



This tornado, captured on film from a parking lot at the Carpenter Recreation Center in Thornton, touched down outside the city and damaged several structures Sunday afternoon. Photo by photo courtesy of Donna Richter

As many as six structures were damaged or destroyed by the tornado on Sunday, including a trailer home that was flipped over by the powerful winds, according to the North Metro Fire Rescue District. Jerry Taft was inside the trailer when it flipped. He sustained minor injuries and was released from the hospital.

There were no other reports of injuries or property damage.

Tornado warnings were in effect for parts of Adams, Jefferson and Weld counties as the weather turned wild Sunday and again Tuesday. The National Weather Service reported that five twisters touched down, the most severe of which damaged the Southlands Mall in Aurora. There was also golf ball-sized hail and larger reported in some parts of the north metro area.

The funnel cloud that formed into a tornado near Thornton began north of Erie before heading south. It touched down for several minutes and traveled eastward at 15 mph, according to WeatherUSA. The intensity, or classification, of the tornado was not reported.

Donna Richter, who snapped a picture as the tornado touched down, said it was the first time she was eyewitness to such a storm.

"It was pretty amazing," said Richter, who stood in the pouring rain near 108th Avenue and Colorado Boulevard to take the shot. "My husband is from Nebraska, so he's used to it."

Richter said she called her brother, Dave Dewey, who lives in the area where the tornado touched ground, to see if he was safe.

"He was outside and said he couldn't see anything. Then he looked up and it was right above him," she said. "I think he went inside after that."

Tornadoes are relatively common in the area. A storm 28 years ago - on June 3, 1981 - sent more than 50 people to the hospital, destroyed 25 homes and damaged nearly 240 other structures. In June 1988, a Category 3 tornado injured seven people and caused millions of dollars in damages.

"The severe weather season in Colorado starts in June, for the most part," said Carl Burroughs of the National Weather Service in Boulder. "There could be some severe thunderstorms again this week."

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