

Wild weather: NH got a bit of everything

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Yesterday's heat and humidity set the stage for a round of thunderstorms featuring gusty winds, hail and lightning strikes that left a path of destruction across the state.

"It sounded like someone was pelting my roof with baseballs," said Dave Wilson of Orange, whose assessment of the hail was about right, according to the National Weather Service.

"We had 3-inch hail stones in Orange -- that's pretty big, like baseball size," said meteorologist Art Lester, from the Weather Service outpost in Gray, Maine. Sal Guadagnino, also of Orange, was heading home in his dump truck when the hail started.

"It was like someone dumped a bucket of ice on my windshield. I couldn't see anything," Guadagnino said. "In fact, I figured the truck had to be dented. I was worried the windshield was going to crack."

A tornado warning was issued by the Weather Service for Belknap, Grafton and western Carroll counties, which got Mike Colclough's attention. Colclough operates a weather station on Black Cat Island in the Lakes Region.

Yesterday afternoon his weather software recorded an unprecedented 168 mph gust on the little island, which sits in the northern notch of Lake Winnepesaukee. "That's still unconfirmed. I wasn't home at the time, but as soon as I saw the tornado warning, I put everything else aside and reviewed all the data from the weather station," Colclough said.

He suspects a funnel cloud may have dropped down during a heavy thunderstorm that passed over Meredith, around the same time lightning struck a tree behind a mobile home at Scandia Trailer Park on Daniel Webster Highway, according to Carroll County dispatchers.

Lakes Region Fire and Rescue answered the call to check on the tree, which was split by the force of the lightning. Several residents of the park were evacuated as a precaution, but later allowed back inside their homes after fire officials determined there was no immediate danger of the tree toppling over.

As summer lightning storms go, yesterday's was about average, according to Bob Watson, a weather hobbyist who has been tracking storms from his Lisbon home for years.

Between midnight and 7 p.m. yesterday his equipment recorded 7,622 lightning strikes within a 20-mile radius of Lisbon.

"That's a pretty average day for a good New Hampshire thunderstorm," Watson said.

Goffstown fire crews were busy with a number of calls for service yesterday, the most serious came at about 3:30 p.m., when someone on Winter Hill Road saw smoke coming from a neighbor's home.

Fire Chief Richard O'Brien said nobody was home when lightning hit the roof in the rear of 78 Winter Hill Road.

"We rescued a family pet -- a golden Lab -- but the house was left uninhabitable," O'Brien said.

Fire traveled along the roof and into the attic, causing damage to the electrical system and leaving the home with significant smoke, heat and water damage. O'Brien said there were many other calls for damage due to wind and lightning, but none as serious as the house fire.

Public Service of New Hampshire dispatched crews throughout the day to deal with storm-related outages that left up to 4,000 customers at midday without power in central and southern towns.

Hovering sticky air and a slow-moving cold front heading our way means seasonal thunderstorms should be on the weather menu here for the next few days, according to the Weather Service.