

Coffee with the Mayor

Ser 35 (2025-9) Tornado

Over the past few years the weather service has had many tornado warnings, severe storm warnings, flood warnings, all related to weather events. That's their job and they do it well. Get the word out so people can be prepared. When the actual event isn't as severe as predicted, it is easy to become complacent thinking it won't happen here. Friday evening's event should teach otherwise. In the National Weather Service's assessment, the tornado that touched down around Linton and Greene County started as an F1, increased to an F2 north of Linton and grew to an F3 as it continued east. What was left in its wake has been described as scenes from a war zone. Trees broken in half or up-rooted, houses destroyed with roofs torn off, cars and trailers overturned, and families left to face an uncertain future. The type of devastation we've seen on the news in other locations, but this time it's local!

I was first made aware of the tornado by videos my wife showed me that had been posted on Facebook. It was hard to get a reference point from those videos. My first stop was the Police Station to find out what had been reported. An extra dispatcher had been brought in to handle the increase in calls, which were mainly local citizens asking what they could do or where they could go to help. At this point it was hard to determine exactly where the devastation had occurred. Fire Department personnel had been called to the scene of the fatality, not realizing it was storm related. Reports were beginning to come in that the main path of the storm was located in the township, an area served by a number of utilities, some of which were the cities. The Electrical, Street and Gas and Water department personnel began the call out process. Roads were blocked by downed trees making it difficult to get to affected areas and had to be cleared, initially by local residents. Only then was the magnitude of the devastation sinking in.

All city utility departments worked into that evening to clear paths, restore power and check for gas leaks. Electrical crews from the city of Washington responded as well to assist in replacing broken poles and restoring power. Emergency assets from nearby communities were immediately on the scene to address needs as well. City police responded to try to control traffic in the hard-hit areas. Traffic soon became an issue as roads became crowded with people checking on families, offering support or just looking to see the damage. This became troublesome for utility crews in the area trying to assess the damage and being able to maneuver. In spite of the complications, most homes had city utilities restored by the next morning. It will take longer for homes in the outlying areas to have utilities, especially electrical, restored due to destroyed poles and downed trees.

The cleanup began almost immediately. Trees started being cleared from yards that evening and into the next morning. I did see one insurance agent out and about as that will be an issue for homeowners to deal with. The personal stories of survival and witnesses watching the storm pass are the norm. It is obvious there are many lessons learned. The focus now is to capture those lessons learned, what worked and what needs to be improved on and establish guidelines working with other organizations. One area needing improvement is communication, both within the organization and with the public. I'm sure going forward warnings will be taken seriously.

There is one obvious positive. The community outpouring of support and volunteering was overwhelming! Many donations of supplies have been received and businesses have donated supplies and offered extended hours as well. High school students were also part of the volunteer effort. Coming together as a community in time of need is something to be proud of.