

# N.C. communities hit hard by historic April tornadoes

The National Weather Service warned that Oklahoma-style storms were ripping across North Carolina as tornadoes moved west to east during the afternoon of April 16. In the storm's aftermath, a cluster of 28 tornadoes officially had touched down in at least 32 central and eastern North Carolina counties. As Carolina Country went to press, the storm costs reached historic proportions, including 24 lives lost, 133 seriously injured, and monetary damages to businesses and homes exceeding hundreds of millions of dollars.

According to the National Weather Service, the tornado outbreak included five with wind speeds of 136-165 miles per hour.

Gov. Bev Perdue declared a state of emergency the evening of April 16. Within days, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declared 18 counties as federal disaster areas and eligible for assistance: Bertie, Bladen, Craven, Cumberland, Currituck, Greene, Halifax, Harnett, Hertford, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Onslow, Pitt, Robeson, Sampson, Wake and Wilson.

The tornadoes hit rural areas and roared through cities such as Sanford and Raleigh. Sixteen North Carolina electric cooperatives reported power loss to approximately 104,000 members at the outage peak. Co-ops suffered about \$2.5 million in damages to the electric distribution systems, with most damages concentrated in Lee, Harnett, Johnston, Cumberland and Greene counties served by Central EMC of Sanford, Pitt & Greene EMC of Farmville and South River EMC of Dunn. Issues with high-voltage transmission lines mostly owned and operated by investor-owned utilities and not cooperatives caused the majority of the outages. With the help of neighboring electric cooperatives, most outages were restored within 24 hours.

The following crews assisted cooperatives in power restoration:

- To Central EMC: EnergyUnited and Randolph EMC, along with contractors Lee Electrical and Lewis Tree
- To Pitt & Greene EMC: Edgecombe-Martin EMC, Halifax EMC and Tri-County EMC, along with contractor East Coast Power & Lighting



Jody Albright

- To South River EMC: Brunswick EMC and Randolph EMC, along with contractor Lee Electrical

“The electric cooperative family continues to keep in our thoughts all members and their families affected

The area along Rice Road in Central EMC's territory was hit hard by a tornado.



Pitt & Greene EMC

The tornado that moved through Greene County left trees and utilities poles down across the area, including these on Mt. Herman Church Road in Snow Hill.

by the tornadoes while North Carolina recovers from these deadly storms,” said Nelle Hotchkiss, senior vice president for corporate relations at the North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives.

## Helping others hit later

A week later, April 22–28, what was considered the second deadliest thunderstorm outbreak in U.S. history devastated regions of seven southern states, leaving more than 350 people dead and thousands homeless.

Seven North Carolina electric cooperatives sent line crews to assist the electric cooperatives in Alabama and Tennessee with power restoration efforts. The cooperatives that sent crews, including trucks and other mobile support vehicles, to affected areas were: Blue Ridge EMC in Lenoir, EnergyUnited in Statesville, Lumbee River EMC in Red Springs, Piedmont EMC in Hillsborough, Randolph EMC in Asheboro, Rutherford EMC in Forest City and Union Power Cooperative in Monroe.

The deployment of crews is part of a mutual aid agreement shared between the nation's nearly 1,000 electric cooperatives to help one another in times of emergency, like natural disasters. Electric cooperatives across the country use the same line system engineering standards, which means line crews from any part of the country can quickly help sister cooperatives in restoration efforts.

Georgia resident Chris Meadows sent an e-mail message to Piedmont EMC during the early power restoration period: “I drove passed an army of your trucks getting off of Interstate 85 south at Georgia Highway 53 in Braselton this evening...I'm guessing they were headed out to help those hurt by the recent storms. I want to thank you for your help and let you know I am praying for your crews as they get to work.”

## Beware of Scammers

Atty. Gen. Roy Cooper warns consumers to watch out for scams related to recent tornadoes and storms and to report suspicious activity to his office at (877) 5-NO-SCAM (toll-free within the state) or by filing a consumer complaint at [www.ncdoj.gov](http://www.ncdoj.gov).