

Storm downs trees, power lines

By Dominik Stallings

Canadian wildfire smoke, fist-sized hail and hurricane-force winds converged on Douglas County last week bringing with it irritation, astonishment and severe wind damage to trees and homes. No injuries were reported.

Much of the Midwest, Canada and the eastern part of the United States was left breathless by the Canadian wildfires that have been burning since late April. The historic wildfires have already surpassed a record 30,000 square miles of burned area. That is nearly as large as South Carolina.

The smoke from the fires has resulted in some of the worst air quality in the world in the United States and Canada. Arcola, Tuscola, Villa Grove and the rest of Douglas County have also been affected by this smoke reaching "very unhealthy" levels according to the Illinois Air Quality Index. The American Lung Association warns that air pollution can lead to a number of diseases that affect health and lead to premature death.

A severe thunderstorm pushed back the smoke out of Douglas County. One of the worst storms in the area's recent history arrived Thursday afternoon. The same morning, hail, almost the size of baseballs, hit parts of Tuscola with northside residents reporting the largest ice balls. That was followed up by heavy rain and winds reaching 80 MPH. The derecho winds (a line of intense, widespread, and fast-moving windstorms and sometimes thunderstorms that moves across a great distance and is characterized by damaging winds) blew over several semi trucks near Tuscola on the south-



WIND DAMAGE at The Equity in Galton. Photo by Nancy Rairden.

bound lanes of Interstate 57, downed powerlines and damaged trees.

In Arcola, city streets and yards were littered with tree limbs and some residents were without power for days. City Administrator Bill Wagoner said it would take days for city crews to clean up, and he asked for patience and understanding. City Hall was closed due to the power outage.

Farther north, at Galton, the wind blew the roof off a building at The Equity.

In Tuscola, the storm has damaged the roof of the pool building in Ervin Park. Downed trees caved in the fence surrounding the recently refurbished tennis courts. According to Tuscola City Administrator Drew Hoel, several downed powerlines in Ervin Park forced the city to close the park throughout the weekend. A decision on re-opening the park and the pool would be made Monday, June 3.

"Our primary focus will be to continue to clear debris and keep traffic flowing. We will be

working through the weekend, but I'm sure it will take weeks (not days) to get all of the storm debris cleared," said Hoel.

IN VILLA GROVE, Henson Road was closed due to a fallen tree near Front and Harrison Street. Several other streets closed due to the storm. According to the City of Villa Grove Facebook page, cleanup crews removed debris from lines and pushed it out of the way of traffic. Crews will return later to

transport the remaining debris out of the way.

Larry Dallas, former Douglas County Farm Bureau president and farmer said that he personally did not have any hail. But if large hailstones hit corn stalks, they can break the stalks. Farmers would lose the plant and also have the possibility of introducing disease due to broken stalks.

Dallas said the countryside around Tuscola looked similar to the city itself. Lots of broken branches littered the ground. Dallas said he heard of a grain bin that got blown away as well as some roof damage around the county.

The storm itself seemed to have done little damage to Douglas County, said Dallas. Some corn on the edges of fields have been bent over, but since it's still early in the growing season, they have the chance to straighten out. The blown-over corn also still has the chance to pollinate, which helps the size of the ears. Dallas said he heard of one field with plants that were

snapped over, ruining the crop.

Dallas said the rain brought in by the storm was helpful as the area didn't have rain for nearly two months. Soybeans growing in the area should see a growth spurt from the rain. Dallas said he measured three and a half inches of rain in May and only one inch in the following two months after. Dallas speculated that the corn this year will likely be short due to moisture stress from earlier in the growing season.

Douglas County EMA volunteers assessed damage in the county Sunday, June 2. Douglas County EMA is also taking photo submissions of storm damage at ema@douglascountyil.gov. Note the address and damage in the submission.

According to Ameren's outage map, 1,057 Ameren customers were without service in Douglas County as of Sunday, June 2. Several Independence Day celebrations were rescheduled including in Arcola and Arthur.



FRIDAY MORNING, June 30, S. Pine Street, between E. Washington and E. Main Streets, Arcola. Photo by Nancy Rairden.

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