

Storm drenches Fresno and Valley; lightning, flooding reported

By Megan Ginise



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A heavy thunderstorm drenched much of Fresno and other Valley cities on Thursday, stranding cars in a Fresno underpass and dampening a northwest Fresno ice cream parlor.

The severe weather prompted the National Weather Service to issue a flood advisory until 10:30 p.m. Thursday for portions of Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Kings and Merced counties.

The National Weather Service reported at 8 p.m. that two-tenths of an inch of rain had fallen in the Fresno area, raising the seasonal total to 6.15 inches. The average rainfall total for this time of year is 10.91 inches. Last year's total at this time was only 4.77 inches. The rain season begins Oct. 1.

Mark Standriff, director of communications and public affairs for the city of Fresno, said that although the intensity of rainfall was more than anticipated, maintenance crews that he called a "storm SWAT team" were working at locations hit by flooding and heavy rainfall.

As of 8 p.m., Wishon Avenue south of the Shields Avenue underpass was closed down by maintenance crews. Standriff said that although normal drainage systems carry away most of the rain water, the excessive amounts that fell on most areas would take a couple hours to dissipate.

"When you get this much rain in such a short period of time, it overloads the system," Standriff said. "Maintenance crews are working nonstop to take care of these situations as quickly as possible."

The California Highway Patrol also reported flooding on Highway 41 north of Shaw Avenue.

Because of heavy flooding at Palm and Shields avenues, water damaged a Baskin-Robbins ice cream store at the intersection, employee Alma Jimenez said. With the entire parking lot flooded, Jimenez said, water seeped through the front door causing damage to the interior.

In Southern California, rain fell as the cold northern storm rolled through the drought-stricken region.

“There’s like a big blob of moisture tracking around,” but it was moving quickly through the region, said Stuart Seto with the National Weather Service in Oxnard.

The storm broke rainfall records for the day in about a dozen places. Downtown Los Angeles got 0.16 of an inch, breaking the old record of 0.03 that was set in 1902. The 0.17 of an inch recorded at Los Angeles International Airport was nearly triple the previous record from 1962.

Santa Barbara Airport got nearly a third of an inch, eight times the 1962 record. Newport Beach got 0.48, well above the 0.16 set in 1957.

Southern California mountains are seeing some snow and could get 3 to 6 inches above 6,000 feet.

Experts say such weather fronts are rare this late in May — and this one won’t pack enough of a punch to make much difference to the thirsty state.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Contact Megan Ginise: mginise@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6614.