

Drenching rains, lightning pummel Valley, I-5 route through Grapevine

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Drenching rains from an intense storm that moved from Southern California into the central San Joaquin Valley flooded roads, triggered mudslides and knocked out power for some neighborhoods.

Interstate 5 through the Grapevine and the areas surrounding the Tejon Pass in Kern and Los Angeles counties appear to have suffered the brunt of the storm, as flash floods unleashed rock and mudslides that trapped cars and closed about 20 miles of the state's main north-south traffic artery, the California Highway Patrol reported.

The freeway was closed about 4 p.m. and hasn't reopened, and the CHP was routing north- and southbound traffic over to coast highways.

Drivers stuck in the mud waited for roads to be cleared while thousands more were diverted to alternate routes expected to take four or more hours to traverse through the mountain region in Southern California. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.

"Due to the drought and fires, all the rain coming down heavily is causing floods," CHP officer Andrew Mack told The Associated Press. "We have a lot of people up there trapped on the roadway."

The storm also triggered mudslides along Highway 58 east of Bakersfield. The highway was closed over the Tehachapi summit, according to the CHP.

The storm rumbled through the central San Joaquin Valley on Thursday afternoon and evening, putting on a spectacular lightning show and dropping enough rain in some areas to cause localized roadway flooding and some mudslides. In Madera County, lightning set a tree and a power pole on fire, according to the CHP dispatch log.

Lightning struck a palm tree in a yard adjacent to Washington Union High School in Easton, knocking out some fronds but otherwise causing no apparent damage.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. reported outages in Kingsburg, Lemoore and Stratford. Southern California Edison reported scattered outages across Tulare County.

The lightning also triggered delays in some Valley high school football games. As of about 5:30, the storm had dropped 0.07 of an inch of rain on Fresno, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The flooding is being caused by a low pressure system bringing rain and severe weather to the region.

The storm was expected to clear out by Friday morning. Fresno's daytime high on Thursday hit 87, but daytime temperatures are expected to begin cooling Friday. The high in Fresno is expected to reach 84, then dip over the weekend into the upper 70s – a little below the seasonal norm of 80.

National Weather Service meteorologist Joe Sirard said as much as 1.45 inches of rainfall was recorded Thursday in parts of northern Los Angeles County. The system was expected to slowly drift eastward through Friday.

In Lake Hughes, about 40 miles east of Fort Tejon, Los Angeles County Fire Department Capt. Keith Mora said the agency rescued four people and two dogs from atop one car. Many more were able to walk to safety after waiting out the flood on top of their own vehicles, he said.

Bee staff writers Jim Guy, Rory Appleton, Tomas Kassahun and the Associated Press contributed to this report.