On the COVER

Oklahoma City Metropolitan-Area Tornadoes 2013

Kathleen A. Musson, CAE

On May 20, 2013, a tornado measuring 5 on the enhanced Fujita scale (EF) and carrying 200 mph winds ripped through the quiet community of Moore, Oklahoma, leaving a 17-mile trail of destruction; 24 deaths, including 10 children; and estimated damages of more than $2 million. It was estimated that 90% of Moore's police fleet of vehicles sustained substantial damage, and its only hospital was totally destroyed. Unfortunately, this twister was the fourth to hit the same area in 14 years.

In the wake of its destruction, first responders from across the country and local volunteers poured into the area to begin search and rescue efforts. They faced fires and natural gas leaks, and found entire neighborhoods completely wiped out, streets littered with debris, and unstable structures. It was more than 24 hours before many residents were allowed back into the area to check their homes. Residents found themselves homeless, and they started sifting through piles of debris with the hope of finding personal items or pets not swept away by the tornado's unfathomable force.

Morgan McGill, a close friend of my daughter Kandice, grew up and had taught school in Moore for 7 years. Because Morgan's family home had been totally destroyed in the May 1999 Moore tornado, she personally knew the level of destruction possible; so only a few hours after the tornado struck, Morgan and Kandice went to check the status of Morgan's family and friends. Because access to the site was limited, they drove in as far as they could and then proceeded 2 miles into the area on their bicycles. The cover photograph depicts what they saw on arrival. Fortunately, Morgan's family was safe, and damage to their home and cars was possible to fix; however, they were profoundly shaken when they saw the destruction of the homes of their friends who lived in the hub of the major damage near Briarwood Elementary School. They helped with a search for their friends' belongings, including their 3 dogs. The bodies of 2 were ultimately recovered, but the smallest dog was never found.

Officials praised the collaborative efforts of all responders and were deeply touched by their assistance to those affected by the deadly Moore tornado. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army's Emergency Disaster Services, and others provided food, beverages, and clothing immediately to all in need. Collectively, more than 170 000 meals and snacks and 6000 tetanus shots were provided by employees and volunteers. In the days following the tornado, 1700 experienced medical personnel registered with the Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps, totaling more than 4600 medical personnel on registry in Oklahoma.

Sadly, on May 31, *another* destructive EF5 tornado struck El Reno, Oklahoma, and areas south and east of there. This tornado was the widest measured ever to date, swelling from 1 to 2.6 miles wide within a 30-second span, carrying 295 mph winds, and catching storm chasers and residents off guard with its unexpected turns. Carrying the impact of 2 of the Moore tornadoes combined, it resulted in 22 deaths, including 3 storm chasers, and further destruction including loss of homes and businesses. The 295-mph ground winds surpassed every world record except the more than 300-mph winds recorded in the 1999 Moore tornado.

Powerful storms are expected in "tornado alley," but certainly not 2 weeks in a row and not hitting the same area 4 times within 14 years, ravaging working class neighborhoods, and affecting many first responders where they live and work. First responders routinely deal with tragedy but not always those involving their own families and friends. Thankfully, many responders answer the call to help and to serve their communities. We know that Moore, El Reno, and other areas devastated by tornadoes will rebound and rebuild, because as Americans, we represent "**the home of the brave.**"

About the Author

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