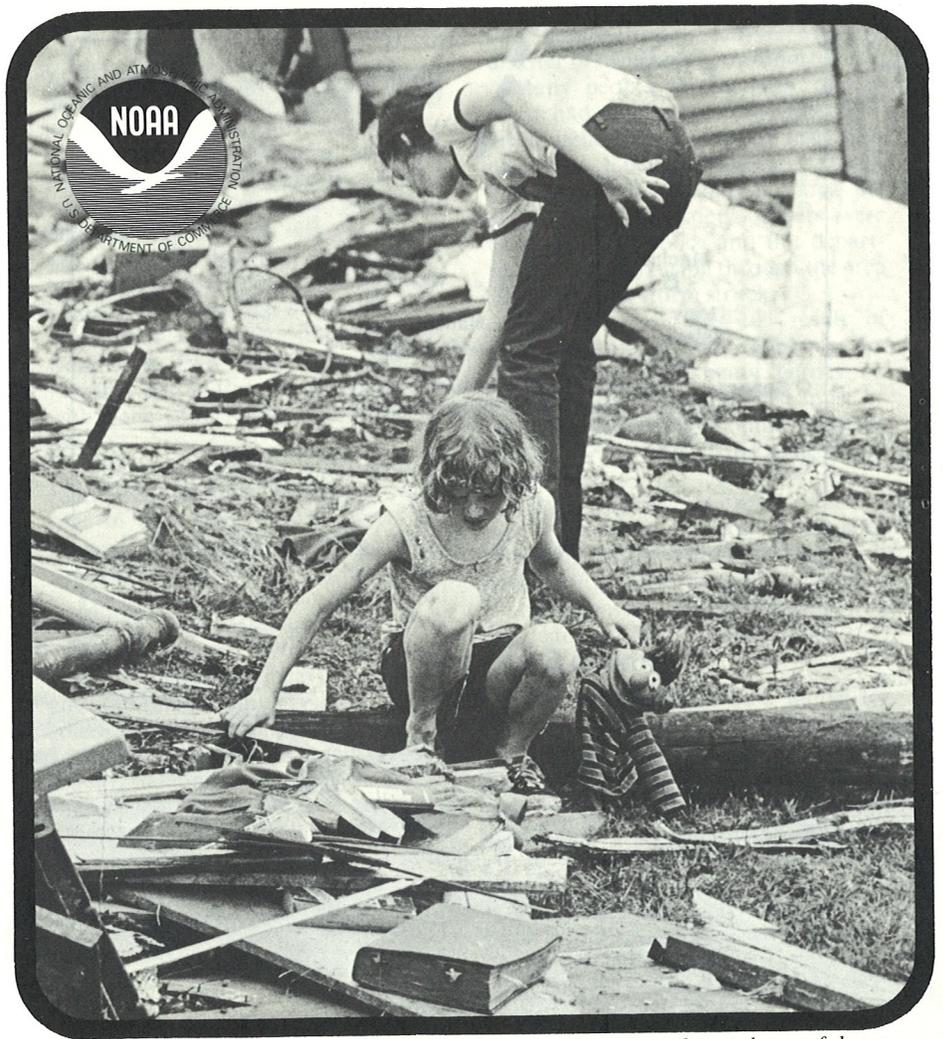


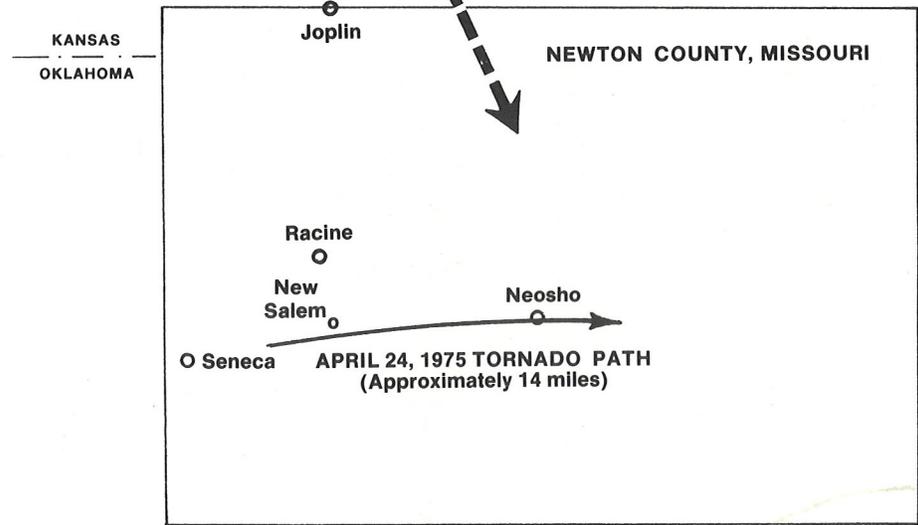
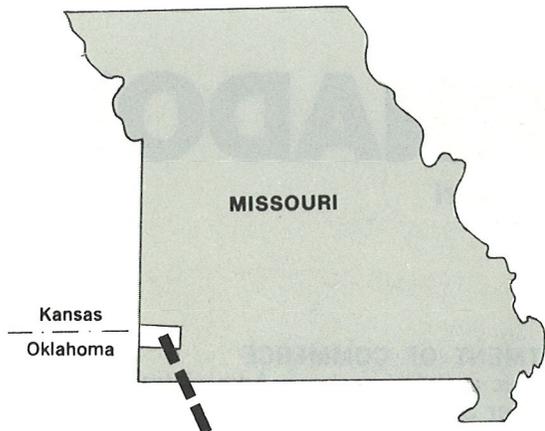
TORNADO!

Neosho, Missouri
April 24, 1975

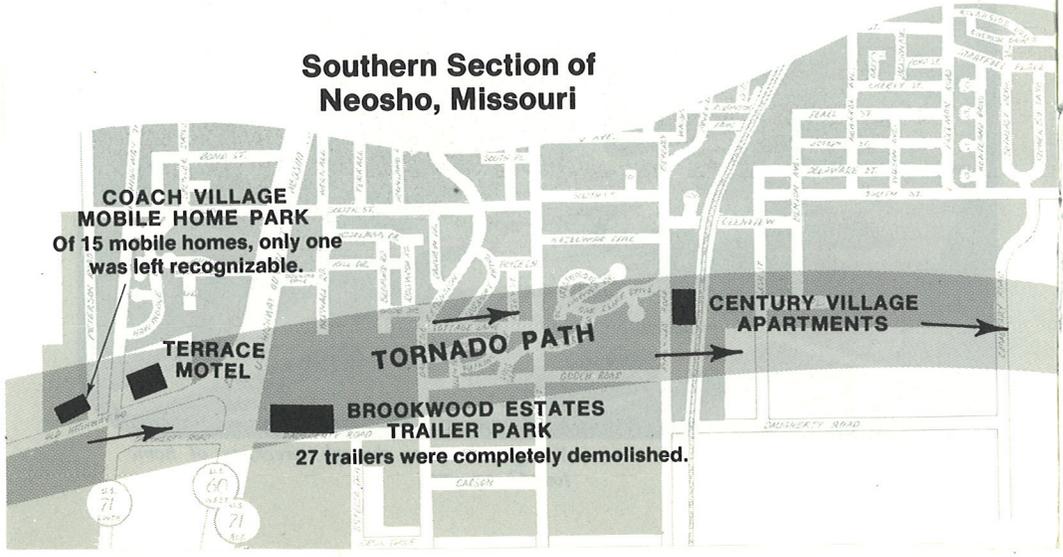
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Weather Service



*Young girl sifting through wreckage of home
found her puppet.*



Southern Section of Neosho, Missouri



COACH VILLAGE MOBILE HOME PARK
Of 15 mobile homes, only one was left recognizable.

TERRACE MOTEL

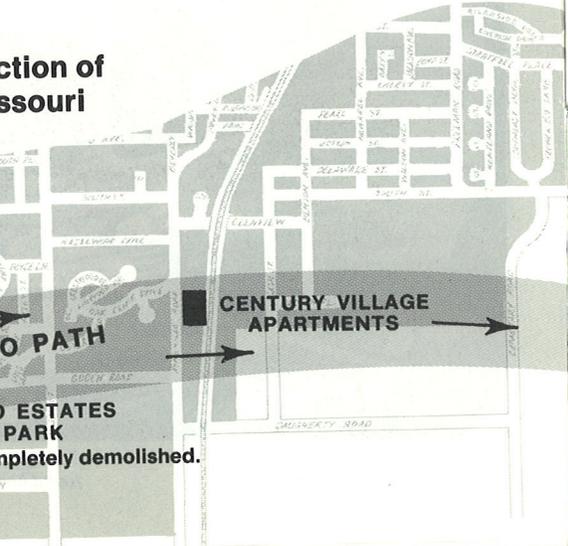
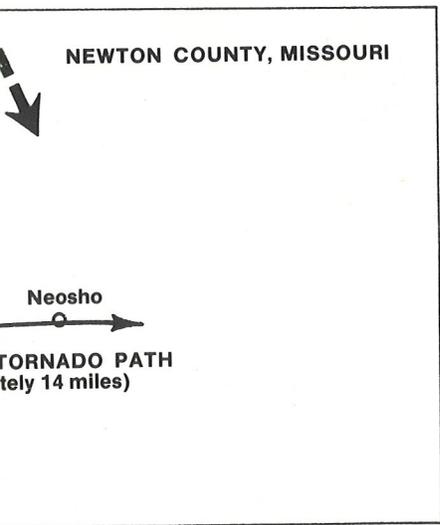
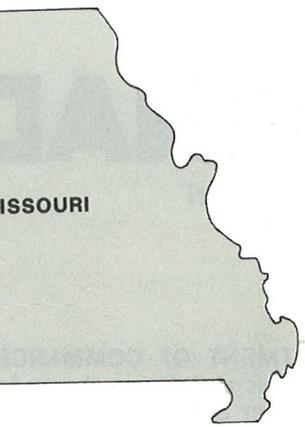
BROOKWOOD ESTATES TRAILER PARK
27 trailers were completely demolished.

CENTURY VILLAGE APARTMENTS

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THE CITY of Neosho in the south-western corner of Missouri in Newton County has a population of 7,517. Joplin is 20 miles to the northwest, the Oklahoma border a little less to the west along Old Highway 60. If you drive in on "60" you may have seen a sign: "The Flower Box City - An All American City."

The evening of April 24, 1975, was a terrible one for Neosho, but its citizens and dedicated county and local officials helped the city live up to the title, "All American City."

THE STORM, a "maxi" tornado packing winds estimated as high as 200 miles per hour, ripped through Neosho at 8:04 p.m. Traveling at about 40 miles per hour, the devastating funnel hit the west side of town, straddling Old Highway 60. Two minutes later it was gone. The half-mile wide twister had been on the ground for 14 miles before it lifted just east of Neosho.

When it was over, three persons were dead. Two lived to the west of Neosho, one to the east. No one died within the city. Twenty-two were injured.

Public and private property damage reached \$17 million. About 400 dwellings in and near Neosho were destroyed or severely damaged. Hundreds more were extensively damaged.

The tornado completely demolished Coach Village Mobile Home Park (about 15 homes), virtually destroyed the Terrace Motel, heavily damaged the well-built Century Village Apartments, and roared on through the residential area on the east end of town leaving an unbelievable path of destruction.

The tornado struck the Brookwood Estates mobile home park containing about 26 homes with incredible force. According to Ray Nelson who heads the Springfield National Weather Service Office, destruction was so utterly complete at Brookwood Estates "that it was difficult to determine that there

had been mobile homes in the area. The only clue was twisted metal underframes and some wheels."

THE "MIRACLE", as the *Neosho Daily News* put it when summing up the warning effort, is "that tens of hundreds of persons were not killed or maimed, which almost surely would have been the case had it not been for the quick and efficient action of Newton County and Neosho officers who set emergency procedures in motion, giving citizens the very few minutes they needed to take cover, averting disaster of much greater proportions."

Many people in the path of the storm had seen or heard Weather Service watches or warnings on television or radio well before the tornado struck and they acted—leaving the area for places of greater safety. Others were alerted by city police and fire department siren cars racing through the area just before the storm struck.

The "miracle" was the result of careful planning and deliberate actions. There were many heroes on April 24. But topping the list must be the Neosho Fire and Communications Center — the hub of the action that night.

"Bud" Shaffer, National Weather Service Central Region Emergency Warning and Community Preparedness Officer, described the Center as "a modern, first class operation, run by dedicated, well-trained people.

THE CENTER could be a model for any city or county, big or small. The first two sentences from their 6-page operational plan reads: "Centralized Municipal Communications Centers can inject a new dimension of effectiveness and efficiency into several municipal operations. The overall purpose of a centralized municipal communications center is to help set into motion those actions needed to provide service to the citizens of the community."

On April 24 they indeed did inject dimensions of effectiveness and efficiency. They did set into motion those actions that saved the lives of scores in the community. The operations plan is signed by Joe Abramovitz, Sheriff of Newton County; George Kelly, Chief of Police, Neosho; and Bill Grey, Asst. Fire Chief, Neosho.

The Communications Center can broadcast and receive simultaneously on State Police, Sheriff's, Police, and Fire Department frequencies. They use a Plectron System — a radio alerting device activated from the Center. Among other strategic locations, its signal is received by all schools in Newton County. Communicators monitor law enforcement frequencies in Kansas, Oklahoma, and other Missouri counties. A high-speed printer

operated by the State Patrol and connected to all law enforcement units is located in the Center. The printer also is linked to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's NOAA Weather Wire, a direct teletypewriter link from the National Weather Service to news media and public service offices.

At 6:35 p.m. a tornado watch issued by the Weather Service's National Severe Storms Forecast Center covering Newton County was received at the Center. The tornado warning issued by the Weather Service Office at Springfield at 7:00 p.m. was received on the Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System at 7:03 p.m. The warning also was sent simultaneously to all broadcasters, including the Joplin radio and television stations and radio station KBTN at Neosho.



One apartment in Century Village complex

THE WARNING
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BULLETIN
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THE ACTION c
April 24 was pic
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19:33:20

Report received c
Miami, Oklahoma

19:34:00

Communications
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Neosho.

19:34:50

Newton Car 36 (S
Lieutenant) repor
Center that he ha
of a tornado in Se

19:36:52

A telephone rep
Package Store in
had knocked ove
trees.

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One apartment in Century Village complex

THE WARNING issued in terse telecommunication language read:

**BULLETIN
TORNADO WARNING
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
SPRINGFIELD MISSOURI
ISSUED 7 PM CDT APRIL 24,
1975**

A TORNADO WARNING IS IN EFFECT UNTIL 8 PM CDT FOR PERSONS IN JASPER, NORTHWEST NEWTON AND EASTERN BARTON COUNTIES.

A TORNADO WAS REPORTED BY THE PUBLIC 8 MILES NORTH OF MIAMI OKLAHOMA AT 6:50 PM CDT AND IS MOVING TOWARD THE NORTHEAST AT 45 MPH.

THE ACTION during the night of April 24 was picked up by a ten-channel recorder at the Center which records all incoming and outgoing radio and telephone communications. A partial chronological log recorded during the tornado emergency follows:

19:33:20

Report received of tornado north of Miami, Oklahoma.

19:34:00

Communications Center telephone call to ask KOAM Television, Pittsburg, Kansas, what their radar "shows down in Oklahoma coming this way." Comms Center was advised that watch and warnings were out for northeastern Oklahoma and that radar showed cells around and to the south of Miami, OK, that were moving toward Neosho.

19:34:50

Newton Car 36 (Seneca Police Reserve Lieutenant) reported to the Comms Center that he had received a report of a tornado in Seneca.

19:36:52

A telephone report from Tri-State Package Store in Seneca that a twister had knocked over a semi-trailer and trees.

19:37:58

Seneca Tornado was reported by the Comms Center to Missouri State Patrol, Troop D Headquarters, Springfield, MO.

19:38:20

Newton 3 (Deputy Sheriff Vincent Pearman who was off duty and accompanied by his wife) volunteered to assist.

Newton 3 asked to work toward Seneca.

19:41:06

Telephone call from citizen who saw tornado from 2-1/2 north of Seneca moving northeast mostly unintelligible but his last words were, "I'm going."

19:45:04

Joplin Police reported to Neosho that they had received a report of tornado on ground in Dennis Hollow (between Racine and Seneca)

19:47:18

Telephone call that there was a tornado visible from Ragland Mills (feed mill) between Seneca and Racine moving toward Neosho.

19:47:34

All units were dispatched to the west side of town.

19:49:22

Newton 3 (Deputy Pearman) reported tornado on the ground just west of New Salem.

19:49:54

Deputy Pearman was asked if it was headed toward Neosho and the response was affirmative, "10-4, coming right up old 60."

19:50:13

"Newton 3 has one on the ground headed towards Neosho. Activate the warning system." (This was a broadcast on all three frequencies; Sheriff, Police, and Fire Department. The tone alert can be heard in the recording prior to the broadcast of this statement. Siren sounded at this time and cars with sirens began patrolling the city.)

19:51:16
Police cars were ordered to sound the alert on the west side.

19:51:43
Car 3, Deputy Pearman, reported from New Salem that, "This is a bad one out here. It's headed that way." (meaning toward Neosho)

19:56:18
Other Newton County cars and State Patrol, Springfield, advised of current location and movement of tornado.

Some cars dispatched to Greenwood Addition to sound sirens.

19:57:29
Comms Center advised that tornado was still on ground moving east.

20:01:41
Report of tornado at the power sta-

tion. (about two miles west of town) (The tornado must have entered the extreme west edge of Neosho about 2004CDT.)

20:02:00
Lost transmitter power at the Comms Center.

20:06:00
A report received that the tornado was in Zig Zag Heights (a residential area at the east side of town).

The actions taken as the result of the watches and warnings, the spotters reports, the use of the sirens, and the broadcast by T V and radio were textbook examples of community preparedness. People at the mobile homes, in the apartments, and in the residential areas received the warnings and took refuge in safe places.

Sifting through wreckage of home looking for belongings. Note time — 8:10 p.m., 4/24/75.



THE WINNERS — and groups instrumental in related duties, honored at a special ceremony at the home of C. Baskin, Deputy Director of the Weather Service's h

Deputy Sheriff Joe Abramovitz, William Grey, George Kelly, City of Neosho, Newton County Police Department, Sheriff's Department, Fire Department, Newton County Seneca Police Department, KUHL Television, KODE Television, KBTN Radio, KOAM Television, Troop D. Miss



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THE WINNERS — Everyone in Neosho; but in particular, 16 individuals and groups instrumental in issuing life-saving warnings and performing related duties, honored June 26, 1975 by the National Weather Service. At a special ceremony at the Teledyne Recreation Center in Neosho, Robert C. Baskin, Deputy Director of the Central Region, presented the National Weather Service's highest honor, the Public Service Award to:

Deputy Sheriff and Mrs. Vincent Pearman
Joe Abramovitz — Sheriff, Newton County
William Grey — Assistant Fire Chief, Neosho
George Kelly — Chief of Police, Neosho
City of Neosho — The Honorable Rebecca Hall
Newton County — The Honorable John Schonkwiler
Police Department, Neosho
Sheriff's Department, Newton County
Fire Department, Neosho
Newton County Civil Defense
Seneca Police Department
KUHLE Television, Joplin, MO.
KODE Television, Joplin, MO.
KBTN Radio, Neosho, MO.
KOAM Television, Pittsburg, KS.
Troop D. Missouri State Highway Patrol



A close-up of communications console, Plectron for alert, and "scanner" receiver.

Photographer Describes Tornado

Peter Rudy is the photographer of the NEOSHO DAILY NEWS. On April 24 he was near his apartment on the eastern part of the city watching for the storm. He saw it — too close for comfort! Here is his vivid description of the tornado.

Photographer sees First twister

A few minutes before 8 p.m. Thursday, I sat with my camera in the parking lot of my apartment complex hoping to catch a glimpse of my first tornado. As an Easterner recently moved to this area, my previous experiences with twisters has been limited to the Wizard of Oz.

By 8:05 I was standing amongst rubble as far as the eye could see and expecting to run across a Munchkin or Tin Man.

When radio reports placed the wind funnel in Seneca, the residents of Sir Justin Apartments gathered in the west parking lot to confer with other neighbors and possibly see the approaching storm. Within minutes of the report, the winds died down to permit an approaching roar to be heard.

In the west, jet black clouds appeared larger as the sky grew dark. The roar became louder, and although no funnel could yet be seen, the outcome of the next several minutes were obvious to most as they ran for cover.

I elected to stay outside; a twister could be no worse than a hurricane and I've been through many on the east coast. Another man joined me and we sat on the trunk of a car as the roar reached deafening levels. A few moments later, the winds picked up, and I lost my storm-watching companion.

Within seconds I was mesmerized by the sight of a huge black funnel filled with debris. The roar of the wind

changed to the pounding of what I thought was hail. As I ran for cover in the apartment building doorway, I noticed it was not hail that was pounding me, but a storm of gravel. Although the winds at this time were already rocking several cars up onto two wheels, nothing could be heard over the sound of flying gravel.

Standing in the doorway, I had a clear view of the debris-filled funnel, yet felt protected from the winds. My secure feeling soon left as I saw a pickup and camper tumble gracefully through the parking lot. Again I was mesmerized by the sight of the funnel and the enormous size of the debris swirling in front of me.

When the door I was propped against blew off its hinges, my trance was broken and I quickly realized a tornado was about to go over me. As I ran to take cover, I was pulled down to the carpet by an enormous wind suction. With my coat around my head and clutching my camera, I could hear the crashing of the roof as it disintegrated above me.

Before I had a chance to regroup my thoughts, the wind died suddenly. Jumping to the door, I saw the row of cars although damaged, still standing in a line, and the building was standing. When I reached the parking lot, eyes turned east to Century Village in disbelief. If there is an angel of death, surely he had just visited us.

The photographs and first-hand account of the storm appearing in this publication are used with permission of the *Neosho Daily News*