

DISASTER TEAMS' HANDS FULL WITH STORM HAVOC

Roads, schools, homes flooded, winds wreak damage, power out as cold fronts batter Cape

SHAKIRAH THEBUS

shakirah.thebus@inl.co.za

INFRASTRUCTURE damage to homes, roads, power supply and schools amid more disruptive rain expected today has kept disaster management services on high alert.

The Level 8 storm that hit the province Wednesday night battered several neighbourhoods, with residential roofs blown off in Wynberg, 217 schools reporting damage to infrastructure, and at least 10 000 households impacted by power cuts.

The Western Cape Transport Infrastructure Damage Report showed that at least 100 roads had to be closed yesterday due to safety concerns, including the Borchers Quarry outbound off-ramp, Bainskloof Pass and Franschoek Pass.

The City said teams were working around the clock to attend to hundreds of electricity service requests, including area faults in Lakeside, Rondebosch, Platteklouf, Woodstock, Fish Hoek, Constantia, Bishopscourt, Plumstead, Athlone, Pinelands and Newlands.

Wynberg ward councillor Carmen Siebritz said at least eight households of 10-20 people, including minors, were hardest affected by the storm and strong winds in Wynberg East yesterday.

"Between Plumstead and Wynberg, there were at least 40 streets reporting power outages, fallen trees covering streets and blocking entrances and exits, an average of 22 flooded streets, which in some instances resulted in flooded homes too," Siebritz said.

Speculation online was that a tornado had ripped through Wynberg, resulting in the destruction to roofs.

The Cape Town Weather Office, however, said that it was unlikely that it was a tornado or even a landspout.

"There is no meteorological evidence that suggests this is possible. The damage most likely occurred from strong straight-line winds," it said.

Wynberg resident Mansour Wyngaardt, 59, said the damage occurred around midnight yesterday.

"I have lived here all my life and this is the first time something like this happened to us in the 59 years that I've been living here. This is a disaster!"

All the rooms in his two-bedroomed home had been affected.

Wyngaardt said that the entire ceiling had to be removed, replaced and repainted.

He managed to get a mere two hours sleep yesterday. However, he was troubled throughout he night at the thought of how much needed to be done.

"My wife was the only one at home and she phoned me to say I had to come home because the ceiling was sagging. So I assumed it was only the ceiling, but when I came home, I saw what had happened.

"The roof and those of my two neighbours were also affected. But luckily no one got injured. We just lost quite a lot of stuff."

Neighbours and relatives had rushed to assist the family to remove all their belongings from inside the house.

"It's going to take a while for us to recover because of all the loss. Unfortunately, I'm not insured. I bought the house about two months ago from my sisters. My daughter and I were going to go to the lawyers next week to sort everything out, but unfortunately, it happened before that time," Wyngaardt said.

Human Settlements Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi, Deputy Minister

Tandi Mahambehlala and Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis, visited Khayelitsha yesterday to assess emergency interventions and the City's response.

Nikiwe Swartbooi, 26, from Nkandla, Khayelitsha, had sought shelter at a church opposite her home after winds had completely lifted and taken apart her home on Friday.

"The storm took my house on Friday night. We were inside. I was scared because I have a baby," she said.

Inside the home, Swartbooi lived with children ages 14, 8, and the month-old baby.

The church is also made of corrugated iron with its resistance to the weather at risk as her home had been.

While heavy rainfall had stopped for a few hours yesterday, at the home of Sonetta Kupido, 59, in Khayelitsha, efforts were still underway to get rid of water which had collected inside her shack.

"I've been staying here for 35 years now. It's very bad. I must ask children to come help me here. It's very stressful and the doctor said I mustn't stress because of my diabetes and high blood pressure and I've got arthritis all over my body. It's very cold."

Kubayi said there were over 800 informal settlements identified as category C or in danger in the City alone.

"The teams between province and local were saying that there are quite a number of land parcels that we do not have access to, so we'll go back and look at what we can do. We're told there's a land parcel closer to the airport that is privately owned that we can go and approach. The City has

been trying to sell that land, which can actually solve a huge number of the challenges we have.

"So it's work that we've got to do. I'll go back to the Minister of Finance, so that we are also proactive. Because I know he is agitated by us always spending money in response to the disasters. He's been saying, 'can you be proactive and prevent these disasters or prevent people from drowning, especially in informal settlements that you know are likely to be affected'."

She said they would be returning in two weeks' time to the councillors of affected communities with a plan of action.

"In Mbekweni, Drommedaris, Paarl, there is complete devastation.

"Some sewerage was flowing into the informal settlement as well. Unfortunately, if you look at the number of people affected, there's not enough accommodation for them. There are not enough community halls to accommodate them," Kubayi said.

Hill-Lewis said he raised with the minister that there was no need for five military bases in Cape Town.

Speaking to the *Cape Argus* on this, he said: "They should be given over to Human Settlements or to the City to use for housing. Five enormous pieces of military land, all unnecessary. They are not used by the military. There's a few people stationed there, maybe a few vehicles stored there, otherwise it's basically quiet, derelict and abandoned. That's the kind of parcels of land that we need to make a real difference. Otherwise we're talking about tiny parcels, here, there and everywhere."

Education MEC David Maynier

announced the decision to reopen schools in the Cape Town, West Coast and Eden and Central Karoo districts, while schools in the Cape Winelands and Overberg districts would be closed today.

"(Some) 217 schools across the province have now reported some form of damage to school infrastructure or disruption. Last night's heavy rains and strong winds unfortunately contributed towards this figure; 86 cases are regarded as serious and require our attention. Our infrastructure teams are addressing these cases as fast as possible. I am grateful for their continued commitment in these adverse conditions," Maynier said.

The SA Weather Service has issued a yellow level 2 warning for damaging winds today and a yellow level 4 warning for disruptive rain until tomorrow.

Premier Alan Winde said that the Western Cape's Provincial Disaster Management Centre continued to co-ordinate multi-disciplinary responses.

"Daily Joint Operations Centre meetings will be held until this inclement weather has passed us. I urge all residents to remain safe and not take unnecessary risks. All stakeholders – disaster management teams, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and faith-based groups – have been working incredibly hard under terrible conditions to keep residents out of harm's way. I cannot thank you enough. We have all shown how we can come together during disasters to help one another. This is the Western Cape that I am so very proud of," said Winde.

WEATHER

Flood victims protest over damage to their homes

MANDILAKHE TSHWETE

mandilakhe.tshwete@inl.co.za

FRUSTRATED Kleinvlei residents near Blue Downs took to the streets yesterday in frustration over flood damage to their homes.

The residents said they had informed ward councillor Kariena Mare on Monday about the damages, before barricading roads with rubble and burning tyres yesterday.

The police had to intervene, and in videos shared widely on social media, adults and children stood around as the police spoke to two people.

A man wearing a blue jacket then pelted a rock at the City staffers wearing orange and black rain suits.

The police grab the man by his dreadlocks while rubber bullets are fired to disperse the crowd.

Mare said: "The protest was all about the floods, they told me about it and I reported it on Monday. According to them the relief didn't come fast

enough. But they also informed me that for the past two years, it's been the same thing and they don't get any assistance from the City."

She explained that residents want their drainage system to be upgraded.

"Kleinvlei is previously City-owned houses and were then sold to the people.

"It's semi-formal houses but the floods affected some formal houses. I couldn't go to them this week because I have a family funeral in Gauteng, I will see them next week.

"There were people from the City to assist them. I want to meet with the community leaders and the people of road infrastructure and the subcouncil and we can pave the way forward."

Police spokesperson Joseph Swartbooi said reports suggested that around 100 disgruntled community members of Keerom and Albert Philander Streets staged the service delivery protest near to the premises of Disaster Management. "The community members used burning tyres to barricade the road and in the process obstructing the normal flow of traffic. Integrated Law Enforcement agencies were deployed to the area to restore calm. Kleinvlei police registered a case of public violence for further investigation. We can confirm that no suspects have since been arrested."

FLOODING

Organisations rally to assist the homeless

GRECIA MGOLOMBANE

grecia.mgolombane@inl.co.za

CONCERN for the homeless caught in the storm and those left destitute by flooding, has spurred local organisations into action.

U-turn Homeless Ministries said it experienced a drastic increase in clients seeking shelter at their Homeless Support Centres, which has led them to taking the decision to provide emergency assistance.

This as the City said more than 6 500 flood assistance kits have been issued to residents in informal settlements.

U-turn's chief operating officer, Valerie Govender, said they have partnered with Christ Church Kenilworth to provide emergency shelter for those living on the streets.

"It is incredibly cold and wet and the wind is making it unbearable to find refuge on the street. The makeshift tents and thin plastic that usually provide warmth are useless," she said.

"We are appealing to the community to assist us by dropping off blankets, sleeping bags, canned food and thin mattresses to help provide more safe space beds during this storm."

Donations can be dropped off at their headquarters in Cape Town, and they will be open today until 9pm to receive donations.

Humanitarian organisation Gift of the Givers said storm damage to informal settlements has left scores of residents destitute as they lost everything.

"Gift of the Givers teams have been inundated with calls from various communities around the Cape Flats as the cold wet front moves over the Western Cape. Our teams have been on the ground to do assessments in various informal settlements across the Western Cape.

"Local municipalities have appealed for sandbags to prevent homes and structures from being flooded."

To support the organisation visit www.giftofthegivers.org/make-a-difference

Mayco member for human settlements Carl Pophaim said 37 areas across the metro have been impacted by the storm, the worst affected being Khayelitsha, Lwandle in Strand, Nomzamo, Gugulethu, Masiphumelele, Macassar, Sir Lowry's Pass, Mfuleni, Tafelsig and Vygieskraal and Ocean View.

He said during a meeting with the National Minister of Human Settlements, Mmamoloko Kubayi, on Wednesday, representatives of all government tiers reiterated their co-operation and to look at all efforts to expedite assistance, especially to the most vulnerable people affected.

"With 6 500 flood assistance kits already issued, some relocations done and milling material delivered to soak up the water where possible, the level and volumes of assistance required have been unprecedented. And it will increase. I've been in areas across the metro to assess conditions and to play my part in handing out flood relief kits to affected residents.

"The City's Human Settlements, Disaster Risk Management, Basic Service and Safety and Security teams especially have been out in full force to provide assistance to Cape Town's residents and particularly the most vulnerable residents in informal settlements," said Pophaim.

Storm-related donations can be made to City drop-off points: Goodwood Fire Station, Lakeside Fire Station, Ottery Fire Station, Roeland Street Fire Station, Sir Lowry's Pass Fire Station, and Strand Fire Station.

CAPE OF STORMS

GrandWest, Promenade Mall flooded

VENECIA VALENTINE

venecia.america@inl.co.za

MALLS and entertainment venues were not spared the impact of the storm surge yesterday, as GrandWest Casino, Liberty Promenade Mall and Westgate Shopping Centre reported flooding and damage to infrastructure.

Staff at GrandWest reacted quickly when a shallow pool of water formed outside the casino area yesterday.

GrandWest general manager Mervyn Naidoo said: "At approximately 5am, GrandWest experienced localised flooding in the wake of the level 8 storm. Mopping up operations began immediately as we have staff on duty, 24 hours a day.

"Fortunately, flooding was mainly contained to a passage outside the smokers' casino, but the equipment inside was not affected. Both casino floors are open and operating normally, but parts of the passage in The District have been closed as a precaution since further rain is predicted. Our engineers and technicians have been working on the damage in the roof since early this morning.

"We are grateful that our damage is so minimal given that Goodwood appears to have been badly affected by the storm. We note that many roads in the area are flooded and several homes and businesses have suffered enormous damage. We are fortunate to be able to offer support by donating R50 000 worth of non-perishable items to the Goodwood Fire Station, and we will be holding a soup drive in the Elsie's River community (today)."

A video circulating on social media shows a flooded Liberty Promenade Mall in Mitchells Plain.

The video shows water stretching from Entrance 1 towards the Woolworths entrance.

A staff member of a retail store said they received a message from centre management that read: "Dear Tenants, due to leaks in certain areas of the mall, please note that stores from Entrance 1 to Code are unable to trade at this time.

"However, staff will be permitted access to enter their stores. We will continue to provide updates throughout the day. Thank you for your under-

standing and cooperation."

Liberty Promenade Mall brand manager, Najeeba Ebrahim, said the mall remained fully operational.

"We are aware of a video circulating on social media, reporting that the mall is closed for trade. We wish to clarify that the mall is fully operational and trading as usual. Entrance 1 is open to the public. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard, and would like to extend a big thank you to the cleaning and security teams for their hard work in resolving

the situation."

Another staffer at the mall said maintenance was done on the roofs prior to the storm.

In another video, a flooded Westgate Shopping Centre was also affected by the aggressive weather.

The parking area of the mall is also flooded with no way of using the drive through to the outside restaurants.

Centre management's Lydia Du Plessis said: "There has been very minimal damage, with only two minor leaks."

NATION

Floods claim man's life

OKUHLE HLATI

okhule.hlathi@inl.co.za

AUTHORITIES were able to recover the body of a man who was swept away by water in Blackheath after he slipped while walking in a flooded road and fell into a drain.

Police and City rescue teams retrieved the body in a flooded canal following hours of searching.

According to reports the man was attempting to cross the flooded road at about 7am when he fell and drowned.

Western Cape police spokesperson Joseph Swartbooi said Mfuleni police registered an inquest for further investigation.

“According to reports an unknown man walked on a pavement near to the corners of Range and Stellenbosch arterial roads when he slipped and fell into a nearby canal. At the time of the incident the roads were flooded. SAPS and fire and rescue divers were deployed to search the area where the person was last seen by a witness.

“The body of an unknown man was retrieved from the water. The victim was declared deceased on the scene by the medical personnel,” said Swartbooi.

This was the first flood-related death since the inclement weather hit the province last Friday. To date about 50 000 people have been affected across the Western Cape and more than 15 000 structures damaged by heavy rains and gale-force winds.

In Wynberg, roofs were blown off some houses and buildings yesterday while in Monwabisi Park, the water table rose and severely flooded the area.

“Arrangements are being made to relocate approximately 500 affected residents to facilities made available by our Western Cape government and our heartfelt appreciation to Golden Arrow Bus Service (Gabs) for assisting with the transport requirements,” said City Disaster Risk Management Centre (DRMC) spokesperson Sonica Lategan.

National Human Settlements Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi and her deputy Mahambehla led a human settlements delegation to assess progress of interventions for families and by yesterday evening the 500 families were boarding Gabs buses to get to the relocation sites.

“We have made other commitments and requested that the councillor and residents give us two weeks. Together with the City and province we are working to find solutions; 500 were registered only in ward 99 and there are a total of about 10 wards affected. The relocation is for those submerged and lost their shacks.

“We are also working with councillors, we will provide material either to rebuild or sheets just for the roofs. Assessments will continue but we have enough space for relocations,” said Kubayi.

Western Cape Education MEC David Maynier announced that Overberg and Cape Winelands education districts will remain closed today.

The closed schools are expected to reopen on Monday.

“A total of 217 schools across the province have now reported some form of damage to school infrastructure or disruption. Last night’s heavy rains and strong winds unfortunately contributed towards this figure, 86 cases are regarded as serious and require our attention,” he said.

In the Drakenstein region, the municipality has urged residents of Newton in Wellington, who have evacuated their homes voluntarily, to not return to their homes yet and remain with family members and friends for now.

This followed a thorough assessment with engineering experts and specialists to ascertain the dam wall failure risk of a 150 000-cubic-metre farm dam in the Bo-Dal area, above Newton, as well as an analysis of rain predictions for the next 48 hours.

TREES UPROOTED

Roofs fly as howling storm hits the Cape

Fierce winds tore off roofs and uprooted trees as the third cold front in five days howled across the Western Cape on Thursday.

“It has been a busy night for the disaster operations centre, with dozens of calls about weather-related impacts,” said Cape Town disaster risk management centre spokesperson Sonica Lategan.

“Apart from flooded and obstructed roadways, there have also been reports of flooding in a number of residential areas, and electricity outages.”

Schools were closed due to safety concern related to a level 8 warning of disruptive rain throughout the day. At least 15,000 people have been affected and are being assisted by authorities and NGOs.

Roofs were blown off houses and overhead electrical cables damaged in the suburb of Wynberg.

“Crews from Constantia responded to the incident, and found four houses affected on the corner of Sussex and Bute Roads. The occupants of the properties were relocated to alternative accommodation,” said Lategan.

The city’s public emergency communication centre (PECC) logged 339 incidents between 6pm on Wednesday and 6am on Thursday. More than 40% of the calls were weather related.

“During the period, 54 calls were received about flooding of homes and severe weather conditions, and 85 calls [related] to conditions on the roads, including motor vehicle accidents and trees obstructing roads,” reported the centre.

Teams have attended to hundreds of electricity service requests related to storm damage.

“As the severe weather conditions continue to hit Cape Town, we are likely to see more weather-related damage to electricity infrastructure in areas across the city. Our teams have already attended to more than 100 electricity-related faults in the last 24 hours,” energy MMC Xanthea Limberg said on Wednesday.

SA National Parks (SAN-Parks) has closed off sections of Table Mountain National Park and the whole of Tankwa Karoo National Park due to flooding and heavy snowfall.

“Excessive mudslides, overflowing rivers and damage to access roads due to heavy rain have contributed to the closure of sections inside Table Mountain National Park,” said SAN-Parks.

Sections of Table Mountain National Park that were temporarily closed are the Cape Point overnight hiking trail and the roads to the Overseers Cottage, Olifantsbos Cottage and Smitswinkel and Slangkop tented camps. All access roads leading to Tankwa Karoo National Park were closed due to snowfall.

Emergency services were on high alert in George along the Garden Route where winds of up to 60km/h were expected on Thursday. Emergency personnel were attending to fallen trees obstructing roads and power outages in the city. /TimesLIVE