

# Tornado causes significant damage near Innisfail

Several tornadoes touched down in central Alberta on Thursday, July 7

**By Michaela Johnstone, Central Alberta REA Communications Co-ordinator**

What started out as ominous-looking clouds ended in devastation for several land owners outside Innisfail.

Four tornadoes touched down in central Alberta on Thursday evening, July 7, including one that hit farms about 10 kilometres west of Innisfail.

A Power Line Technician from the Central Alberta Rural Electrification Association was one of the first on scene after the tornado touched down outside Innisfail.

Corey Tibble was on call Thursday night and began repairing power lines in the aftermath of the storm around 5:30 p.m.

His first call for a power outage took him west of Bergen.

Tibble said on his way to that first call, the sky just west of Olds was dark and swirling clouds were starting to form.

Tibble also responded to power outages near Eagle Hill, Bowden and then west of Innisfail.

It wasn't until about 8:30 p.m. when Tibble said he received the call for an outage on the line that serves Kaban and Burlein.

"I couldn't get down Range Road 21," Tibble said, motioning to the downed trees that littered the road that night. Instead, he had to drive through a field to get access to the power line.

Despite the damage inflicted on several residents, Tibble said there weren't a lot of power outages – "it's surprising for a storm like that."

But broken power lines meant a long night of work, which continued all day Friday, as well.

Monica Kaban and Mike Burlein, who own a beef cattle operation and several horses along Range Road 21, just off of the Cottonwood Road, saw some "really ugly clouds" starting to form late Thursday evening.

"We saw it build up and start to spin," Burlein explained, adding he and Kaban then jumped in their car and took refuge in their neighbour's weigh scale.

"It [the tornado] lasted about three minutes, according to our neighbour," said Kaban.

But in that short time, Burlein said the roof was blown off the weigh scale building, and the walls came down on their car.

"We're alive," Burlein sighed, adding the car is still under the wall, but he and Kaban weren't hurt.

"And our house is still standing, which is surprising."

Although their house is still standing, Burlein and Kaban's property sustained extensive damage – hundreds of thousands of dollars worth, Berlein estimated.

The majority of the roof of the farm's horseback riding arena was blown off and the walls caved in; fencing around the property also sustained a lot of damage; a holiday trailer was blown over; shingles and pieces of siding are missing from several other buildings.

Friends and neighbours stopped by Kaban and Burlein's home to offer support and help.

On the other side of Range Road 21, Andy Jones and Corrine Alstott came home to find their dreams had been torn to pieces.

"We've only owned this house for one week," Alstott said, looking out over her wind-torn yard and buildings.

"We weren't here when it happened. We were in Calgary, visiting our son, and our neighbour called and said we had better get home."

Alstott said she and Jones arrived home around 9:45 p.m. on Thursday night, but she said the range road and their driveway wasn't accessible because of downed trees.

"I walked in from the highway," she explained. "It was all gone. All I could think was, 'Oh my God. What bad luck.'"

The neighbour that had alerted them to the tornado is also Alstott and Jones' employer, and they bought the house to be in closer proximity to work.

"We knew this was our dream place, and we loved it the minute we saw it," Alstott said of their home. "It was beautiful. We spent all of our savings getting this place."

Going forward, Alstott and Jones said they don't know what they'll do.

"We don't really have a plan. Fix it, I guess," said Jones, and Alstott added they will also need to get their insurance company out to investigate.

"You never imagine it will happen to you," said Alstott. "It's very unreal."

The tornado blew down the garage near the house, with only the parking pad left as any evidence a garage may have once sat there. The tornado also took siding off the house, blew the roof off the barn and took down several trees, just to name some of the damage caused.

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The riding arena on Monica Kaban's property is almost unrecognizable after a tornado on Thursday, July 7. The roof was torn off and the walls caved in.



Above photo: CAREA Power Line Technician Darcy Wood climbs a newly-installed power pole to string the power line back up and get the power working again. Left photo: A portion of the metal roof from Monica Kaban's riding arena is pictured laying in her yard.



Above photo: A garage used to sit on the cement parking pad pictured, but a tornado, which occurred on Thursday, July 7, scattered it across Corinne Alstott and Andy Jones' yard. Right photo: Thursday's tornado broke a CAREA power pole in two pieces and snapped many wires along Range Road 21, outside Innisfail.





Broken branches and whole trees lying on the ground were a common sight along Range Road 21, outside Innisfail, after a tornado rolled through on Thursday, July 7.



Above, left photo: A tornado, which occurred on Thursday, July 7, turned a camper trailer over on its side on Monica Kaban and Mike Burlein's property, west of Innisfail. Above, right photo: A door was torn off Andy Jones and Corrine Alstott's home, and landed in their driveway, along with pieces of their garage and other buildings.



Above, left photo: A barn on Monica Kaban and Mike Burlein's property is missing many shingles and the fencing around it is destroyed. The metal pictured came from the roof of Monica's riding arena. Above, right photo: CAREA Power Line Technicians work to replace a damaged pole along Range Road 21, outside Innisfail, on Thursday, July 7, after a tornado touched down.