

# The Virginian-Pilot

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## 3 tornadoes touched down in Hampton Roads and North Carolina on Friday, weather service confirms

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Vicki Cronis - Nohe | The Virginia

Julian and Joyce Richards stand in their yard in the Rock Creek neighborhood of Virginia Beach on Monday, April 3, 2017. A tornado came through Friday evening, and now many homes are covered in blue tarps to temporarily cover the damage. 12 houses in the neighborhood have been condemned, including their home.

Real Life Christian Church staffer Curtis Poor, right, hugs Russell LaParre at his home in the Rock Creek neighborhood of Virginia Beach on Monday, April 3, 2017. A tornado came through Friday evening damaging roughly 60 homes here, including LaParre's. A tornado also demolished Real Life Christian Church on the same night, which moved the congregation to help residents. Members of the church spent part of the day canvassing Rock Creek, handing out gift cards to help in the rebuilding process. LaParre's brother Mike, left, came down from New Jersey to help after seeing the destruction on the national news.

Blue tarps cover a row of houses in the Rock Creek neighborhood of Virginia Beach on Monday, April 3, 2017. A tornado came through Friday evening damaging roughly 60 homes, 12 of which have been condemned.

**Blame it on the sun.**

As sunlight briefly sneaked through a cloudy, rainy Friday afternoon – a welcome respite for Tides fans enjoying an exhibition game against the Baltimore Orioles at Harbor Park – it heated the atmosphere. That's all it took to bring tornadoes to Hampton Roads, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Jeff Orrock.

As a cold front and strong upper-level system moved through the region, the atmosphere heated up enough to create instability, providing the energy for severe weather, he said.

“If we had stayed socked in and raining all day, it wouldn't have happened,” Orrock said.

The National Weather Service confirmed three tornadoes Friday evening.

A tornado that measured between an EF0 and EF2 – on a scale reaching six – touched down on Green Tree Road in Chesapeake, retreated, and then touched down again near Kemp Bridge Drive before moving northeast into Virginia Beach and Rosemont Road.

A second tornado, an EF1, landed 2 miles southeast of downtown Suffolk at about the same time as the first. A third tornado hit a mile south of Powellsville, N.C.

In Chesapeake, the tornado damaged three warehouses. With winds of about 97 mph, it tore roofs from homes.

It peaked at about 120 mph before striking Real Life Christian Church on Centerville Turnpike, Orrock said.

After briefly weakening, it grew stronger again as it approached Landstown High School in Virginia Beach. It lasted 15 minutes, from 6:13 to 6:28 p.m., and traveled 8 miles.

Orrock said homes built more recently have higher wind resistance, and that could be one reason there were so few injuries and no deaths in populated areas like Landstown.

Newer homes have sturdier structural integrity, meaning they can withstand more intense tornadoes while suffering little damage beyond losing their roofs, he said.

The tornado in Suffolk lasted from 5:33 to 5:57 p.m., and meteorologists knew it was on the ground in the Great Dismal Swamp, Orrock said.

It touched down west of White Marsh Road, about 2 miles southeast of downtown Suffolk. It crossed into the swamp, traveled 12½ miles and caused minor damage in Deep Creek.

The third tornado was from a separate storm system in North Carolina, Orrock said. It lasted from 6:15 to 6:24 p.m. Wind speeds maxed out at 80 to 90 mph. It caused damage for nearly 5 miles, mainly to trees, a mobile home and a few buildings.

Hampton Roads is not out of tornado season yet, Orrock said.

The next chance could be as soon as late Wednesday or early Thursday, when strong storms are expected.

The last time the area saw tornadoes was in July 2014 in Virginia Beach and Norfolk.