

Flash floods leave Richmond-area drivers stranded and school canceled on Friday

- By JOHN BOYER, SEAN GORMAN AND VANESSA REMMERS
- Richmond Times-Dispatch May 18, 2018



Barrett Maddox and her son, Brighton, 6, checked out a vehicle caught in floodwater on Gayton Road in Henrico County. DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/times-dispatch

Men looked at water from the Chickahominy River that flooded Greenwood Road in Glen Allen on Friday. The area at bottom right in the photo is the riverbank, close to where the road crosses the river.

I-195 seen from Patterson Avenue looking south. The right and center lanes are closed due to standing water. Police blocks Greenwood Road, which is flooded by Chickahominy River, in Glen Allen on Friday morning, May 18, 2018.

Elizabeth Burmeister, 13, and her brother, Joey, 10, waded into the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico County on Friday morning.

Lanes of I-195 are blocked by flooding water near Patterson Ave. in Richmond on Friday morning, May 18, 2018.

Bryan Finch and his son, Parker, 10, check out flooding near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico on Friday, May 18, 2018.

A vehicle is stuck in floodwater near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico on Friday, May 18, 2018.

David Bradshaw of Henrico checks out flooding near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico on Friday, May 18, 2018.

Elizabeth Burmeister, 13, and her brother, Joey, 10, check out flooding near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico on Friday, May 18, 2018.

Greenwood Road is flooded by Chickahominy River in Glen Allen on Friday morning, May 18, 2018.

Henrico firefighters rescued a motorist from rising floodwaters near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive in Henrico County on Friday morning.

Greenwood Road, Glen Allen, is flooded by Chickahominy River.

Downpours punctuating the workweek caused multiple water rescues and school closures Friday as the threat of flash flooding loomed over a weekend packed with scheduled outdoor events in the Richmond region.

Authorities battled the effects of torrential rain beginning Friday morning, rescuing two people stuck on a bridge in Goochland County, a driver trapped by floodwater in Henrico County and later a man whose pickup truck became submerged in Ashland.

By the afternoon, the barrage came to a lull. But heading into rush hour, the blare of flash flooding alerts popping up on metro area residents' cellphones underscored the fact that the storm hadn't abated.

Authorities implored people to stay in their homes Friday night or at least avoid flood-prone areas.

"There was several places where the roads have washed out," said Capt. Rob Rowley with the Henrico Division of Fire. "We really want to emphasize to folks to not enter flooded water."

Rainfall totals ranged from less than 1 inch for some areas to more than 6 inches in some spots on the northwest side of the metro region.

A main question heading into Friday evening was how much the neighborhoods hit hardest by the rain from Thursday night would fare with more downpours.

Totals topping 4 inches fell across a zone that extends from Midlothian to Tuckahoe to just north of Ashland, which triggered the flash flooding overnight Thursday. Chesterfield County near Brandermill, Henrico near Nuckols Road, Chesterfield near Robious Landing Park, Hanover County near Cold Harbor Elementary School, Henrico near Glen Allen and Caroline County near Ruther Glen saw the highest rain totals that ranged between 5.25 and 6.8 inches.

Henrico police said they had announced a half-dozen road closings by 10 a.m. But by 3 p.m., that had reduced to one road closure. The Hanover County Sheriff's Office said about 2 p.m. that there were still about two dozen road closures throughout the county due to high water.

Henrico firefighters rescued a driver from rising floodwater after their car got stuck just before 6 a.m. Friday near the intersection of Gayton Road and Cedarbluff Drive. Crews arrived to find the car submerged up to its headlights. By the time the crews left, water had reached the door handles.

In Goochland, two people got stuck about 3:10 a.m. Friday morning after their 2013 Kia Soul stalled out amid high water on Riddles Bridge, authorities said.

The driver had ignored signs put up by the Virginia Department of Transportation warning that the road was closed due to high water, said Goochland Sheriff James L. Agnew. "The guardrail at the bridge prevented the car from being swept away," Agnew said.

Water entered the passenger compartment of the Kia before rescue officials could use ladders to reach the man and woman stranded inside the car, said Goochland Fire-Rescue Chief Bill MacKay. It took several hours to reach the two people, neither of whom suffered injuries.

In Ashland, neighbors helped rescue a man whose pickup truck was submerged in rising water.

The threat of flooding caused several school systems to close Friday, including Henrico, Hanover and Powhatan County. Chesterfield and Goochland schools closed early.

Elsewhere in the state, heavy rain overnight helped trigger a mudslide that pushed a home off its foundation near Vinton in Roanoke County. The home was declared a total loss. No one was injured.

Headed into the weekend, rain could fall locally at a rate of 2 inches per hour in the heaviest downpours. An additional 1 to 3 inches of rain is likely for most of central Virginia by midday Saturday, and several inches could lead to more flash flooding. However, severe wind and hail are not going to be the issue that they were from the beginning of the week.

The rain is expected to become isolated after Saturday morning once this stationary front moves out of the region, though river levels will continue rising over the weekend, likely cresting Sunday as Dominion Energy Riverrock, an outdoor sports and music festival that typically draws thousands to Richmond, winds down.