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# 1985 Tornado Outbreak Revisited

- **Nick Sleptzoff, Former EMA Director, Erie County Emergency Management Agency**
- **Tim Dunkle, Former EMA Director, Venango County Emergency Management Agency**

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

**“Partners in Professionalism”**

**September 28-30, 2009**

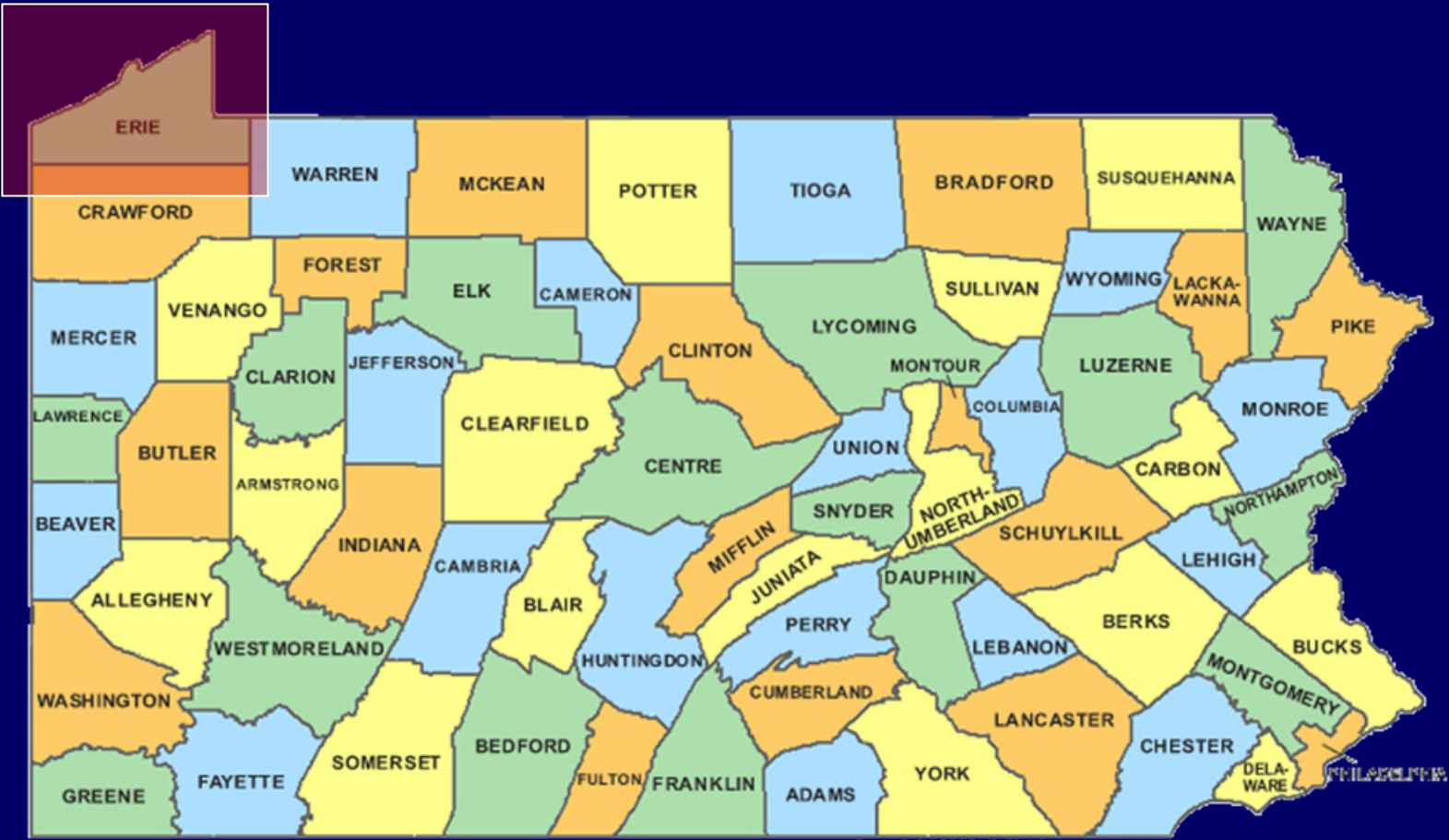






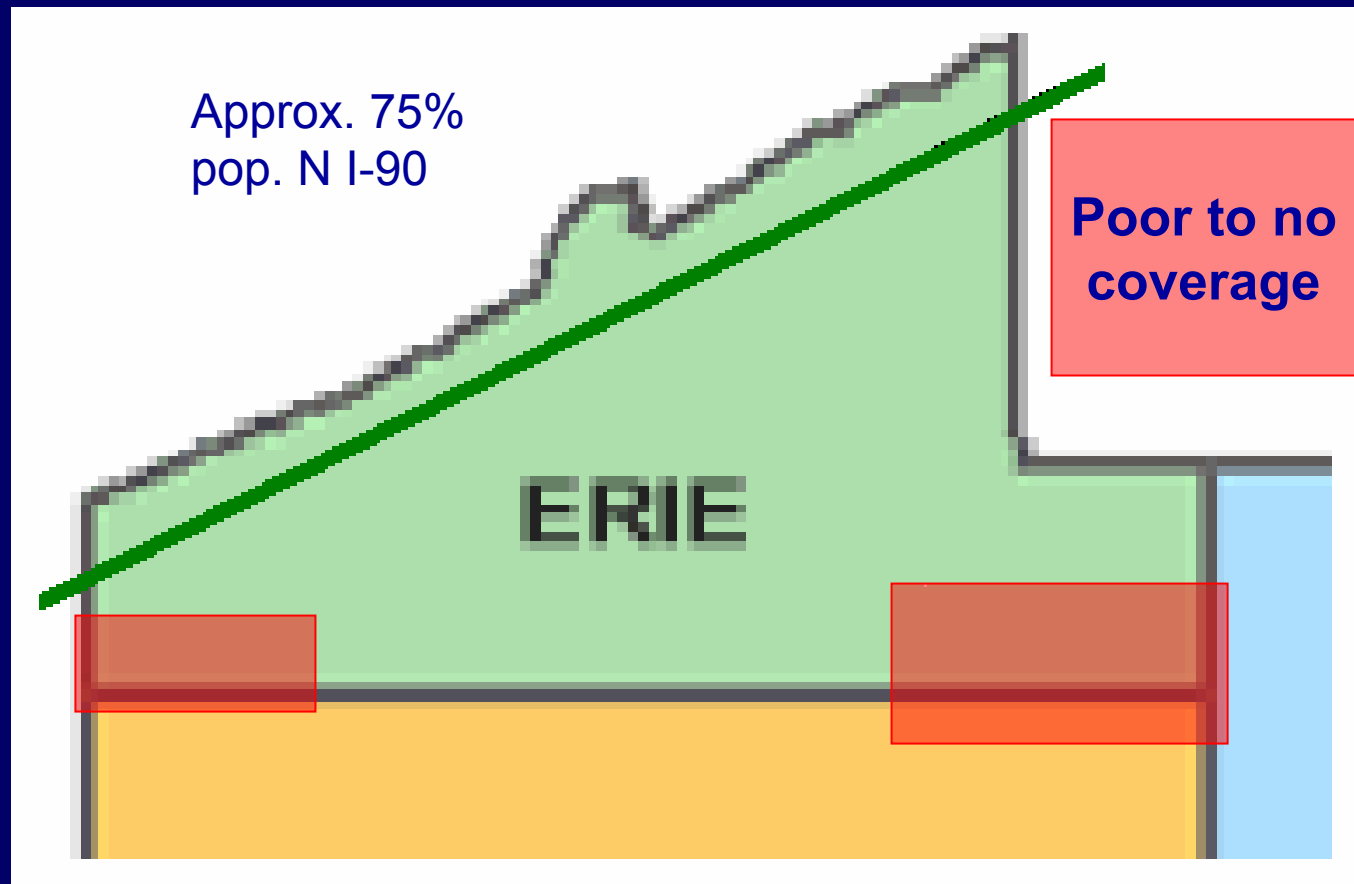


# Erie County, PA



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# Population around 280,000





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May 31, 1985

“The day the twisters came.”

Twenty four years ago, a line of fierce tornadoes attacked Western Pa., leaving 65 dead.

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# **Weather Conditions**

**Several days prior to 5/31, weather unstable, very warm and muggy with afternoon thunderstorms, tornado watches.**

**May 31, air unstable, weather very warm and very humid, mid 80's.**

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07141

May 31, 1985 National Weather Service Issue Tornado Watch at 16:48

21076MM-NWS  
:A' 4H ALLSS ALLII

PHLSLSPA  
:ALB,PIT,CLE,CRW,ILG,PHL:TTAA00 KPHL 312049  
BULLETIN

SEVERE LOCAL STORM WATCH AND AREAL OUTLINE  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE PHILADELPHIA, PA  
148 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985

TORNADO WATCH #211 HAS BEEN ISSUED

BY THE NATIONAL SEVERE STORMS FORECAST CENTER

FROM 500 PM EDT UNTIL 1100 PM EDT THIS FRIDAY AFTERNOON AND  
EVENING

PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES INCLUDED ARE

- |           |           |            |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| ALLEGHENY | ARMSTRONG | BEAVER     |
| BUTLER    | CAMERON   | CLARION    |
| CRAWFORD  | ELK       | ERIE       |
| FOREST    | JEFFERSON | LAWRENCE   |
| HCKEAN    | MERCER    | POTTER     |
| VENANGO   | WARREN    | WASHINGTON |

ORIG: STATION NWS / ACCEPTED 05-31 16:48/ NAME  
DEST: TRACK # 21076MM/ DELIVERY 05-31 16:49/ NAME 21076MM-NWS

ORIG: STATION EXT / ACCEPTED 05-31 16:49/ NAME  
DEST: TRACK # 06043II/ DELIVERY 05-31 16:49/ NAME 21076MM-NWS





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**\*\*\*\*TORNADO WARNING Number 1\*\*\*\***  
**NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ERIE PA**

**513 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985 EXPIRES 530 PM**COUNTIES AFFECTED PA  
ERIE

THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED A TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 530 PM FOR THESE COUNTIES IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA...SOUTHERN ERIE

A TORNADO WAS SIGHTED BY STATE POLICE NEAR PENNSIDE...SOUTH OF ALBION IN ERIE COUNTY AT 505 PM...MOVING TOWARD THE NORTHEAST AT 30 MILES AN HOUR.

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**Note: Most clocks in Albion froze at approx. 5:05 PM**

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## Note

- Before the NWS WSR 88-D Doppler Radar, radar operators hand drew the radar echos on overlay maps.
  - First tornado in the series (Rated F4)
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**\*\*\*\*TORNADO WARNING Number 2\*\*\*\***  
**NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ERIE PA**

**545 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985 EXPIRES 630 PM MAY 31  
1985 COUNTIES AFFECTED PA ERIE AND CRAWFORD**

**THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED  
A TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 630 PM FOR THESE  
COUNTIES IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA ERIE AND  
CRAWFORD. ERIE RADAR SHOWS 3 TORNADOS ON THE  
GROUND ONE NORTHEAST OF WATERFORD ANOTHER  
NEAR CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS AND ANOTHER SOUTHWEST  
OF MEADVILLE. THEY ARE ALL MOVING TO THE  
NORTHEAST AT NEAR 35**

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**\*\*\*TORNADO WARNING Number 3\*\*\***

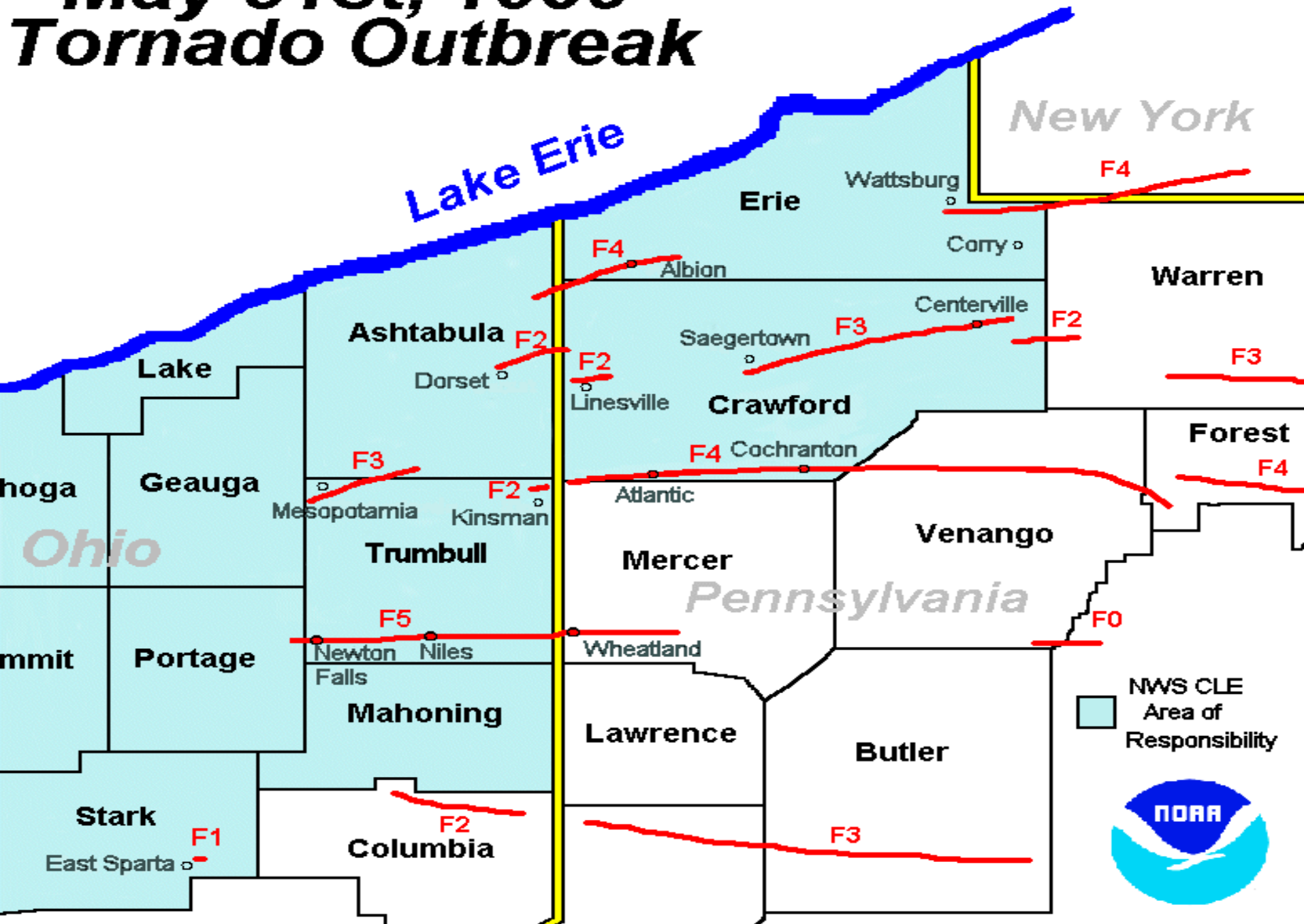
**NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ERIE PA**

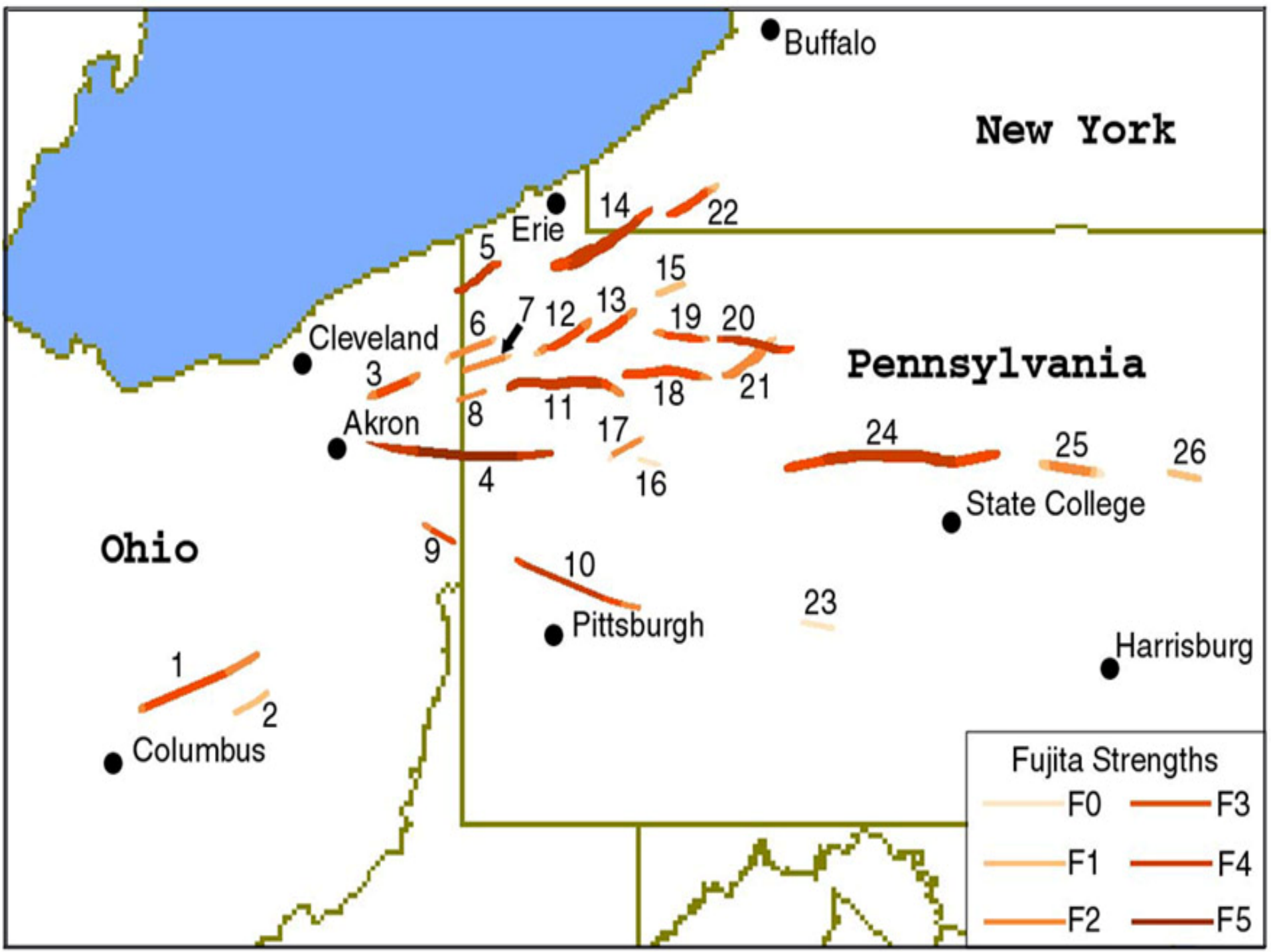
**620 PM EDT FRI MAY 31 1985 EXPIRES 700 PM MAY 31 1985**  
**COUNTIES AFFECTED PA ERIE AND CRAWFORD**

**THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN ERIE HAS ISSUED A TORNADO WARNING UNTIL 700 PM FOR THESE COUNTIES IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHERN ERIE AND NORTHERN CRAWFORD. AT 620 PM ERIE WEATHER RADAR SHOWS NEW TORNADOS ON THE GROUND WEST OF ALBION AND CONNEAUTVILLE PENNA. MOVING TOWARDS THE EAST AT 35 MPH ANOTHER TORNADO SOUTH OF SPARTANSBURG MOVING INTO WARREN COUNTY AND ONE NORTH OF OIL CITY MOVING INTO NORTHERN FOREST COUNTY.**

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# May 31st, 1985 Tornado Outbreak

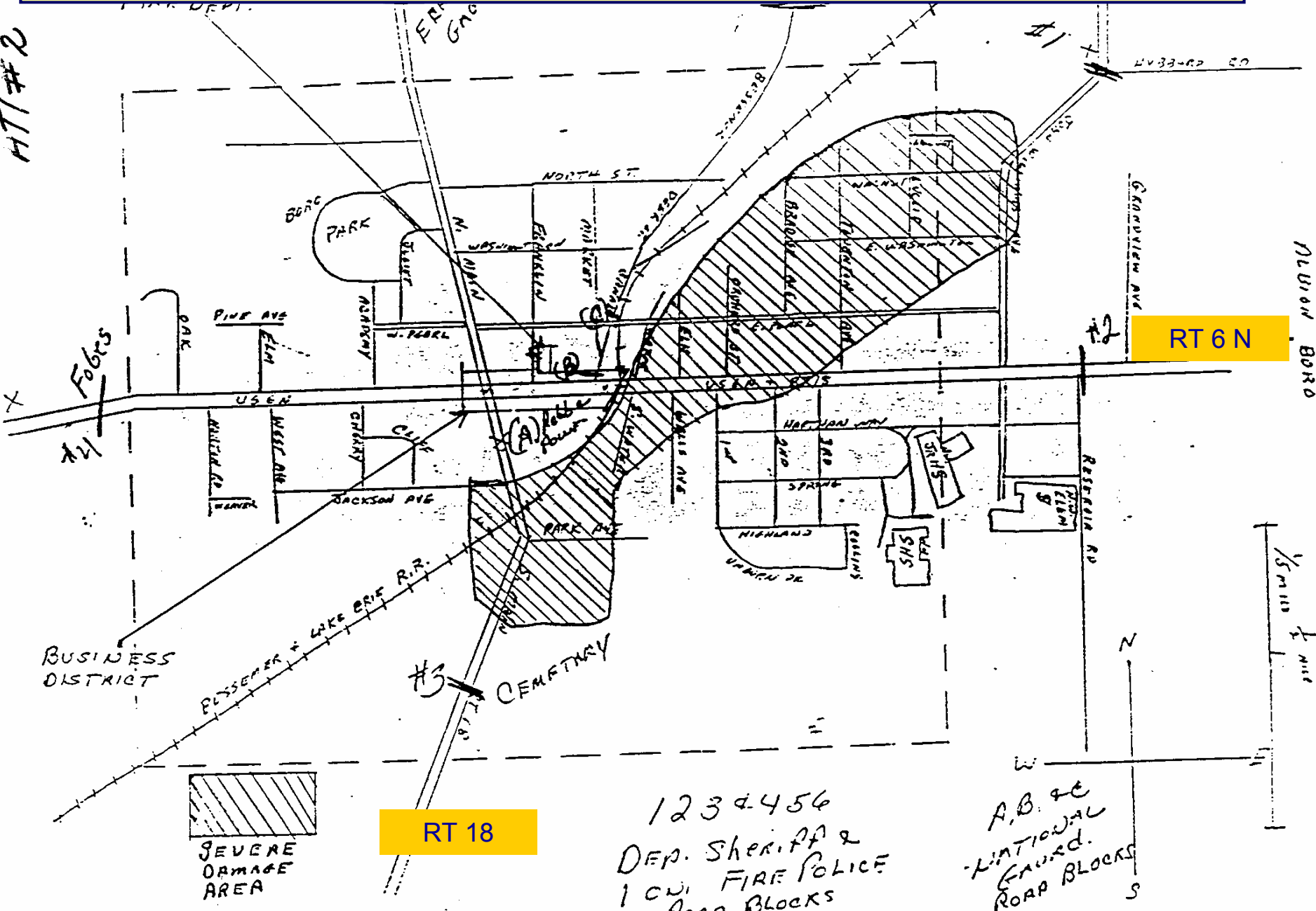






05/31/1985

# Search and Rescue Map of Albion, Pennsylvania



HT1/#2

Foggy

RT 6N

RT 18

SEVERE DAMAGE AREA

123456  
DEP. SHERIFF &  
1 CIV. FIRE POLICE  
ROAD BLOCKS

A, B, & C  
NATIONAL  
GUARD.  
ROAD BLOCKS

1/2 mile

N

S

ALBION BORO

GRANDVIEW AVE

#2

#1

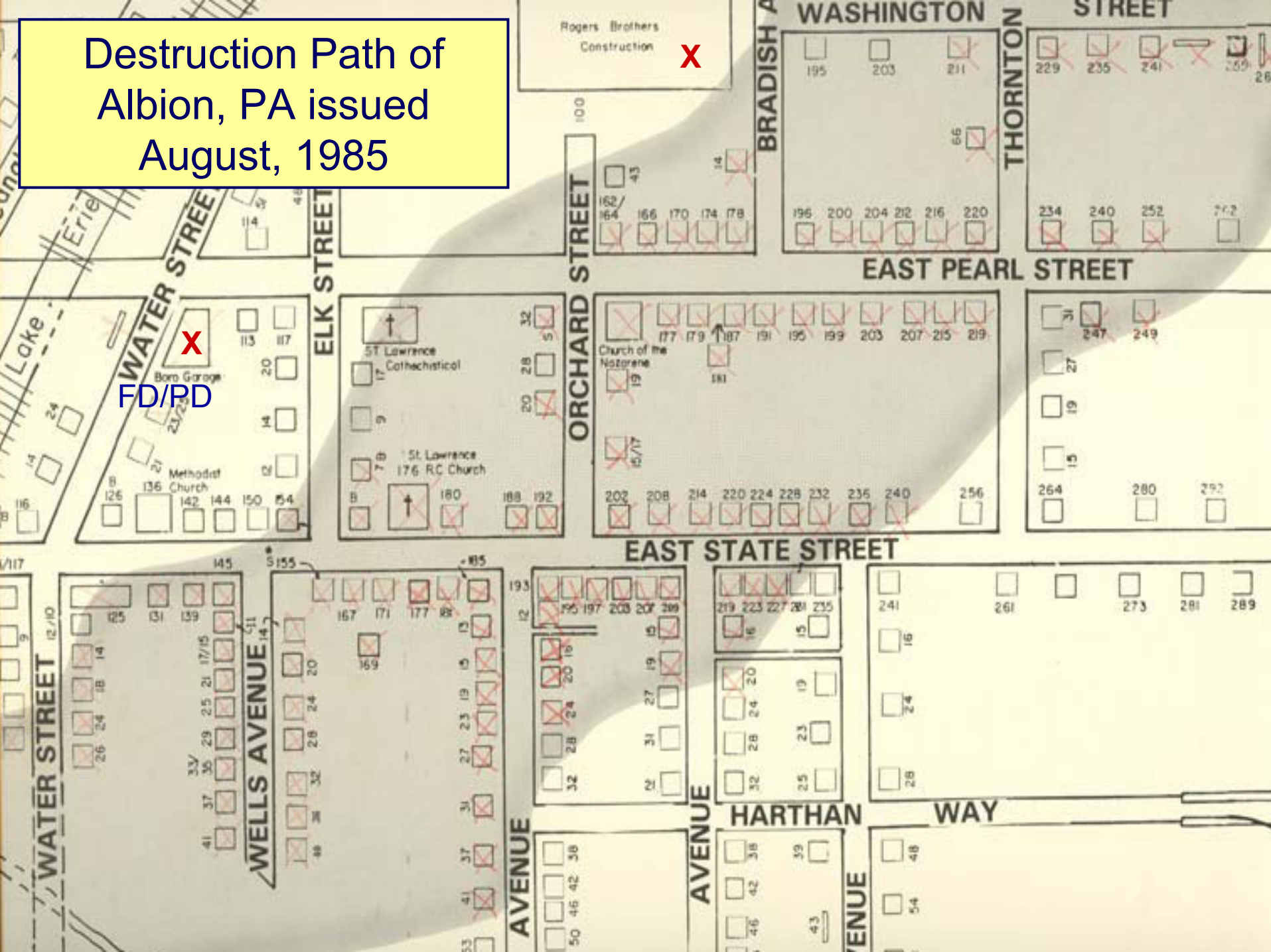
#3

ERT GAC

05/31/1985

# Search and Rescue Map of Albion, Pennsylvania

Destruction Path of  
Albion, PA issued  
August, 1985





































































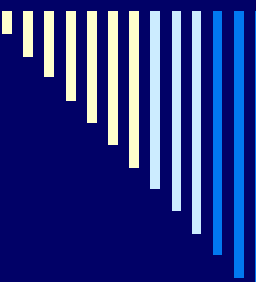


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# Available Technology-1985

- Radios
  - Car phone (RF link via phone company)
  - Pagers
  - Teletypes
  - Dual floppy computers
-





RESOLUTION NUMBER 31, 1985

A State of Emergency and Local Disaster Emergency  
is Declared and Governor Thornburgh Petitioned to  
Request Federal Relief

WHEREAS, a series of tornatoes landed in Western and Southern Erie County on the evening of May 31, 1985, killing at least 12 persons in the Albion area, injuring hundreds of people, destroying countless homes and businesses, leaving many homeless, interrupting power supplies to a wide area and causing widespread destruction of property; and

WHEREAS, the County Executive has declared a state of emergency pursuant to Article VIII, Section 9, of the Home Rule Charter for the County of Erie, as well as a local disaster emergency pursuant to the Emergency Mangement Services Code; the Act of November 26, 1978, P.L. 1332, No. 323 (35 Pa.C.S.A. Section 7101 et seq.), specifically Section 7501 thereof(35 Pa. C.S.A. Section 7501); and

WHEREAS, the economic and other resources required to restore and rehabilitate each affected family and business is beyond the financial capacity of Erie County government;

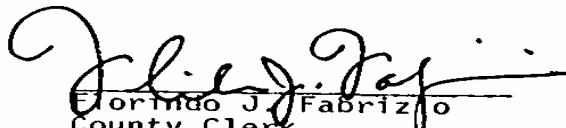
NOW THERE, BE IT RESOLVED by the County Council of the County of Erie that a state of emergency under the Home Rule Charter and a local disaster emergency under the Emergency Management Services Code is hereby declared.


BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on behalf of the hundreds of Erie County citizens who have experienced such tragic personal and material loss, we petition our Governor, Dick Thornburgh, and our respective Congressional and General Assembly that they together heed our plea and request from the Federal Government, in accordance with existing statutes, rules and regulations, all economic and other appropriate relief to which the citizens of this great and compassionate nation and state are duly entitled in the face of this disaster.

On the motion of Ms. Seyfert, seconded by Mr. Leone,  
this resolution was passed on this 1st day of June, 1985, by a  
vote of 6 - 0.

ATTEST:

APPROVED BY:

  
Florindo J. Fabrizio  
County Clerk  
Date 6/4/85

  
Judith M. Lynch  
County Executive  
Date 6/4/85

RECEIVED  
AUG 9 1985  
Erie Co. Emergency Services

21319MM-NCS  
:ALL

HARRISBURG TO ALL COUNTY COORDINATORS

06/04/85 1545

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL DISASTER DECLARATION

THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION WAS RECEIVED FROM THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, REGION III, ON JUNE 4, 1985:

"UNCLAS. THIS IS A MESSAGE ANNOUNCING A MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATION BY THE PRESIDENT. ON JUNE 3, 1985, THE PRESIDENT DECLARED A MAJOR DISASTER UNDER P.L. 93-288.

IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA. THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER IS AS FOLLOWS:

QUOTE: DEAR MR. GIUFFRIDA:

I HAVE DETERMINED THAT THE DAMAGE IN CERTAIN AREAS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, RESULTING FROM SEVERE STORMS AND TORNADOES BEGINNING ON MAY 31, 1985, IS OF SUFFICIENT SEVERITY AND MAGNITUDE TO WARRANT A MAJOR-DISASTER DECLARATION UNDER PUBLIC LAW 93-288. I THEREFORE DECLARE THAT SUCH A MAJOR DISASTER EXISTS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA:

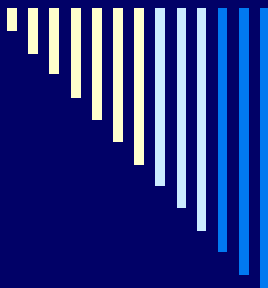
IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FEDERAL ASSISTANCE, YOU ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO ALLOCATE, FROM FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR THESE PURPOSES, SUCH AMOUNTS AS YOU FIND NECESSARY FOR FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.

YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE IN THE AFFECTED AREAS. YOU ALSO ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROVIDE NECESSARY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN THE AFFECTED AREAS, ONCE AN ACCEPTABLE COMMONWEALTH COMMITMENT IS PROVIDED. CONSISTENT WITH THE REQUIREMENT THAT FEDERAL ASSISTANCE BE SUPPLEMENTAL, ANY FEDERAL FUNDS PROVIDED UNDER PL 93-288 FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE WILL BE LIMITED TO 75 PERCENT OF TOTAL ELIGIBLE COSTS IN THE DESIGNATED AREA. SINCERELY, RONALD REAGAN. UNQUOTE.

MR ROBERT J. ADAMCIK OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY WILL BE DESIGNATED AS THE FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER. THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (646-3618) WILL PROVIDE COORDINATION FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER. THE FEMA CONTRACT NUMBER FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER WILL BE FEMA-737-DR.

THE INCIDENT PERIOD FOR THIS MAJOR DISASTER WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN THE FEMA-STATE DISASTER ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT AS BEGINNING ON MAY 31, 1985.

CHA  
K/



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# 1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- ❑ **Over twenty communication centers serving the county.**
  - ❑ **No 911, no intraoperability multiple communication networks (Lo-Band, VHF and UHF). Trunking not available at the time.**
  - ❑ **Areas hit were the worst for radio coverage because of geography.**
  - ❑ **Within a matter of minutes all public safety systems were overloaded.**
  - ❑ **Unaware that other counties (and States) were hit until 12 hrs. later.**
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# 1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- ❑ 12 Fatalities, Over 140 injured required EMS transport of which over 40 (Class I Pts.) had critical injuries.
  - ❑ Not one post-disaster fatality.
  - ❑ Ran out of ambulances.
  - ❑ Initial public safety response was impacted with debris multiple flat tires putting vehicles out of service.
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# 1985 Tornado Outbreak Erie, Pa.

- ❑ **Lost phone service and developed message system for rescue effort.**
  - ❑ **Amateur radio provided limited support**
  - ❑ **Medical Teams and supplies were and dispatched very early into response.**
  - ❑ **Local government response very early into incident (Municipal and County).**
  - ❑ **Early damage assessment provided early disaster declarations and State support.**
-



Published daily from the Grace United Methodist Church in Albion.  
Phone: 756-4407 or 756-3464; Information herein is collected each day  
at a coordination meeting held daily at the church. Information comes  
from almost all agencies involved with the disaster management  
\*\*\*\*\*

If you have any helpful information to be published, get it to  
the Grace Church preferably before 2 PM.

YOU can help disperse this information to residents in the town-  
ship by word of mouth or calling friends or relatives who may need help  
This newsletter is being distributed by hand.  
\*\*\*\*\*

CURFEW-----Friday Night 9 PM to 6 AM Saturday; Entire Albion Boro Affected.  
\*\*\*\*\*

THE FEDERAL STATE DISASTER ASSISTANCE CENTER WILL BE OPEN AT THE SENIOR  
HIGH SCHOOL from 9 AM to 6 PM. Sat. Sunday, Monday (June 8, 9, 10.) ALL disaster  
victims are encouraged to go to the center to discuss available assistance:  
individual and family grants, temporary housing, amended federal tax forms,  
disaster unemployment, insurance counseling, and volunteer services.  
Please bring: 1. Proof of Residence (recent utility bill would do)  
2. An estimate of damage or a list of damage; 3. Types of insurance,  
policy number and name of insurance agent. Social Security No. very helpful.  
TRANSPORTATION TO DISASTER CENTER CAN BE MADE: Phone THE GRACE CHURCH  
756-4407 or 756-3464 or the Red Cross at the Junior High.

TAX REASSESSMENT FOR ALL families suffering damage should check into  
tax reassessment with Mr. Cacco at the Jr. High-Tues.(11th)-9 AM-2 PM.

ZONING PERMITS NEEDED for any MAJOR property changes-J. Bently 756-4280  
after 4:30 PM.

TEMPORARY HOUSING NEEDS--contact Thelma Gunter or E.J. Connors at the  
Jr. High.

\*\*\*\*COMPLETE BURNING BAN IN THE BORO OF ALBION \*\*\*\*Order of fire chief  
and mayor.

PERISHABLE ITEMS (garbage) should be place in dumpsters and garbage cans,  
NOT mixed in rubbish and scrap piles.

FOUND ITEMS REPOSITORIES are established at the Cranesville Fire Hall  
and the Albion News.

MEDICAL SERVICES at the Junior High are limited to nursing care for  
minor needs. Serious needs requiring a doctor will be cared for at  
the doctors' offices.

CHURCHES DECLARED SAFE: The Erie County Dept of Health has deemed  
these buildings safe for public assembly and worship services:  
Assembly of God Church, South Main; Calvary United Methodist Church,  
136 East Main; PARISH CENTER ONLY-St. Lawrence Church, 180 E. Pearl.

FURNITURE DONATION CAN RESUME NEXT WEEK by taking items to the fair  
barns--Thursday, Friday, and Sat. June 13, 14, 15.

CHAINSAW SHARPENING CENTER will be set up in the parking lot across  
the street from the Boro Garage on Pearl St--bar oil and mixed gas  
will also be available.

NEW SMALL HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCE giveaway--next Tuesday (11th) for disaster  
victims at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on 3rd and Spring St.

THE NORTHWESTERN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 85 SAYS THANK YOU!--to  
everyone who helped make our commencement a success. Loaned caps  
and gowns can be picked up at the Sr. High office before July 1st.

DONATE SCRAP ALUMINUM for the NRO park playground project at Bud  
Endean's home on route 6N--756-3087.

Women of the Moose meeting are canceled until further notice.

Counseling and Pastoral Care: pastors will be at all feeding centers  
during the noon and dinner hours. Appointments --call 756-4407 or 756-  
3464.  
Mental Health Services available from 9 AM to 9 PM daily at the Comm-  
unity Service Center--after 9PM call St. Vincent's Collect 452-5151

MAIL for disaster victims can be picked up at the post office after 10 AM  
!!!!!!TOWN MEETING \*\*\*\*TONIGHT\*\*\*\*7 PM at the SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL!!!!!! for  
ALL CITIZENS--ESPECIALLY LOSS VICTIMS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS MEETINGS: the AA will meet at 10266 E. Crane Road (4th house on left from Rt.18) Monday-8PM and Friday at noon call 756-3794 or 587-6182.

MENTAL HEALTH workers will be at the DAC site from 9 AM to 6 PM.

VOLUNTEER WORK CREWS: in order to make effective use of your generous offer to help in the clean-up effort, PLEASE call and SCHEDULE days and times when you will be available. This will insure our ability to use you when you arrive at the center.

RESIDENTS: Volunteers are working and available to help you in whatever you need you may have...food, housing, clothing, furniture, clean-up, babysitting, etc. We will serve you...tell us WHAT YOU NEED! 756-3464 or 756-4407

The DER is NOT shutting down the landfills until the disaster is completely over. YOUR NEEDS ARE STILL A PRIORITY ITEM! Individuals or volunteers working for individuals may haul to the dump site. HOWEVER, private contractors working for hire may NOT dump.

Northwest Legal Services will be available for advice Saturday and Sunday 12 to 3; also Monday from 9 AM to 6 PM at the Junior High.

Red Cross: Comfort Kits (razors, combs, shampoo, etc.) rolls of plastic, and free Bibles are available at the Jr. HL...ALL SERVICES from The Red Cross are FREE. There are no charges, AND no payback is expected. Vouchers are good for 30 days.

Pennsylvania State Insurance Commission will have a representative at the DAC site.

Weekend MEDICAL Services: these will continue through the weekend at the Junior High.

The INQUIRY STATION at the Junior High has been moved from the gym to nearer the superintendent's office.

UNINSURED Loss Victims\*\*\*\*Members of the Christian Disaster Relief Group will be here at noon tomorrow (Saturday) to take application from any uninsured victim needing help rebuilding.

LOST\*\*\*LOST\*\*\*A volunteer worker lost a brown wallet in the Albion area...call 756-3270.

CHAIN SAW SHARPENING AND REPAIR-Eric Swanson will be at the Swanson's Boat Oar Saturday (June 8).

Chainsaw sharpening service-FREE-Ed's Garage  
The laundromat is open!!!!

Cafeteria service to disaster victims and volunteer workers at the following sites on Saturday and Sunday:

Junior High:6:30 AM to 9 PM      Grace Methodist Church:11 AM to 7 PM  
Cranesville Fire Hall:7 AM to 8 PM      Albion Fire Hall:6:30 AM to 9 PM

To donate salvageable home furnishings, call Grace Church.

\*\*\*\*SKATING PARTY! Party sponsored by the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church . JUNE 9 from 6:30 to 9 PM at King's Roller Rink in Kingsville, Ohio. ALL are welcome to attend.

D O G S F O U N D ! White German Shepard with pink/black nose -- 756-3531.  
Large male back and brown mixed breed with orange collar, very friendly...756-3731  
Black and white cocker spaniel...756-4702

H O U S E S F O R S A L E: 4 bedrooms in Albion on dead end street -756-3731  
3 bedrooms, large yard, patio, gas grill, full basement -756-5461  
3 bedrooms, 8 rooms, stone house, 3 1/2 acres at Little's Corners -756-4702  
4 bedroom Market Street 756-5350  
mobile home 14x70 2 bedrooms, fireplace-756-3005

Groups and individuals planning to assist at the DAC site, should register with Superintendent Andy Hills, acting coordinator of the center.

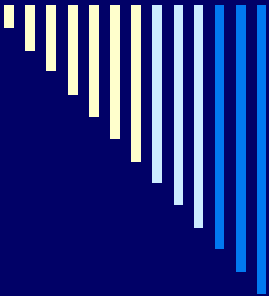
C H U R C H S E R V I C E S-All churches will hold services Sunday. Note time changes.

Grace United Methodist 9:30      Craneriville United Methodist 9:30  
Calvary United Methodist 11:00      Wellsburg United Methodist 9:30  
Assembly of God 10:45      Nazarene 10:55  
St. Lawrence 8:00 and 10:00 (as well as a 5:30 PM Saturday)  
Holy Trinity Lutheran 10:00      ALL TIMES ARE AM except where noted.

An ecumenical worship service for all persons working through the Sunday morning hours will be held at 8:00 a.m. (for 15 minutes) on the street in front of the Albion Fire Hall.

GOD BLESS YOU ONE AND ALL!      OUR AREA WILL RISE AGAIN!





## The Toll of the Tornadoes on May, 31 1985

State	Number Killed	Number Injured	Homes Destroyed	Damage Price
Penna.	65	707	1009	\$376,367,000
Ohio	11	340	300	\$150,000,000
New York	0	16	21	\$4,000,000



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# Questions

- **Nick Sleptzoff**  
**nicholas.sleptzoff@dhs.gov**  
**202-786-9641**
  
  - **Tim Dunkle**  
**tdunkle@state.pa.us**  
**717-248-1115**
-