

Super-soaker slams region

Twisters reported in seven counties, cars go floating as intersections flood, and torrents of storm water overwhelm sewers

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A massive and drenching storm threw lower Wisconsin into a soggy chaos Saturday. Seven counties statewide - Grant, Columbia, Sauk, Dane, Jefferson, La Crosse and Vernon - had reports of tornadoes.

In Milwaukee, two south side buildings collapsed, rescue workers snatched people from cars stalled in streets turned to rivers, while pressure caused by storm waters gushing through city sewers flipped 200-pound manhole covers like pennies.

At one point, water poured into the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's deep tunnel system at a rate equivalent to 10 billion gallons per day, MMSD spokesman Bill Graffin said.

"The highest I'd ever seen it was 4 billion in May 2004 when we had 19 straight days of rain," Graffin said.

Untreated sewage ran into local rivers and Lake Michigan. Graffin said the agency won't know the amount of the overflow for several days.

MMSD's deep tunnel system holds about 500 million gallons, he said.

Graffin said he didn't know whether citywide reports of dislodged manhole covers popping up in the streets resulted from pressure buildup in sanitary sewers or storm sewers.

Buildings collapse

Two vacant buildings that once housed the Acapulco restaurant and bar at S. 6th St. and W. National Ave. collapsed.

From the back of the building, it appears that the second floor collapsed into the first. At the front of the building, a window of the former restaurant was shattered and bricks and debris littered the sidewalk at the intersection. Cream city bricks were piled just below the building's wall and were scattered almost all the way across 6th St.

"The whole house shook," one neighbor said. "It was a big boom."

The Milwaukee Fire Department's structural collapse support unit was on the scene.

"This street's going to be blocked off for a long time, I'll tell you that," one firefighter said.

The Council for the Spanish Speaking purchased the landmark buildings, which date to the late 19th century, in February for \$350,000.

Dani McClain, Dan Egan, Jesse Garza, Tom Heinen, Jim Nelson and Don Behm of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.