

TORNADO DAMAGE - PIEDMONT NURSERY

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In the spring of 1973, tornado warnings came much more frequently than usual in South Carolina. In May, several tornadoes occurred in different areas of our state causing extensive damage. Like everyone else, we are always apprehensive when these storm warnings are out - not only for the safety of people, but for the seedling crop which could be destroyed, putting us out of the seedling business for at least a year. I guess most of us assume that these tornadoes will not occur if they do, they will occur where they will not affect vs.

On May 27, 1973 at about 5 P. M. our luck ran out and a tornado hit our Piedmont Forest Tree Nursery near Salem, South Carolina. This Nursery is in a valley in the foothills of the mountains. We were fortunate in that May 27 was a Sunday and no one was at the Nursery except Nurseryman Carl Durham and his wife. I am sure they would much rather have been somewhere else, but they were not injured - only scared.

The center of this storm, which was about 250 yards in width, passed over the seedbeds where we had planted our seedling crop for this Nursery for 1973-74, across the packing shed and office, and on over the Nurseryman's residence. The Nursery office was destroyed and the roof, ceiling and doors of the seedling packing shed were heavily damaged. The roofs of the equipment shed, shop, refrigerated seedling storage building and Nurseryman's residence were also damaged.

Just after the wind from the tornado had done its damage at the Nursery, a heavy rainfall occurred with over five inches of rain falling in a short period of time. The flash flooding caused by this heavy rain actually did more permanent damage to the Nursery than the wind. Trees were blown down along and across the creek causing a dam, which in turn caused the creek to overflow and wash topsoil from seedbed areas. A strip of Nursery seedbeds along this creek about 80 feet wide and 1/2 mile in length was stripped of approximately 12 inches of topsoil. Soil loss was estimated at 4,500 yards. Additional erosion occurred at the ends of seedbed areas in several areas of the Nursery.

Where roofs had been blown off, water did additional damage to the contents of the buildings. At the Nurseryman's residence, water plus water soaked insulation caused a ceiling in one of the bedrooms to collapse.

Seedlings lost as a result of this storm were approximately 3,000,000. Most of the seedlings were loblolly pine, both regular and improved stock. These seedlings were about three inches in height and just beginning to grow. Following the storm, all that was left was the stem of the seedling or no seedling at all.

The heavy rain caused soil compaction, making it necessary to undercut the beds of seedlings that were left. They had just about stopped growing prior to undercutting the beds.

This nursery had a fairly good stand of timber, both pine and hardwood along border areas around the pond and grounds. We were able to salvage 50,000 board feet of sawtimber and 105 cords of pulpwood from these areas. Some additional sawtimber and pulpwood were not salvaged because of poor accessibility.

Damage to buildings amounted to \$25,000 most of which was covered by insurance. Our Nursery crew has spent 2,761 hours clearing debris from Nursery property, salvaging sawtimber and pulpwood and planting seedlings in areas where the timber stand was destroyed. This does not include the time spent by the Nurseryman, Assistant Nurseryman or Foreman Mechanic.

The devastating effect of tornado winds are hard to believe unless you see the results. I could spend more time talking about unusual things that happened during the storm, such as a window airconditioner that was carried over the packing shed and deposited about 300 feet away, or the shock of finding reports and papers that were on the office desks scattered for hundreds of yards across the landscape; but I think I have covered the worst aspects of the tornado as it affected our Piedmont Nursery.