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September 12, 2017

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Television went from warning system Sunday night to public resource Monday morning.

Orlando stations relayed statistics on power outages, surveyed widespread damage, told of rescues and repeated official warnings.

WESH-Channel 2's Hadas Brown reported that 125 had been rescued from flooding in Orlo Vista in West Orange County. WFTV-Channel 9's Myrt Price showed tempestuous conditions in Lake County. WOFL-Channel 35 anchor Amy Kaufeldt repeated a warning from the Florida Highway Patrol to stay off the roads and added it was the station's job to help tell the story.

The stations will have many recovery stories to tell. WFTV's Karla Ray told of debris scattered on I-4. WESH's Claire Metz examined flooding in Daytona Beach. WESH's Greg Fox warned about downed trees in Orlando.

Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs on Monday said the damage was far worse than expected.

Irma decided to wobble, and Central Florida took a major wallop, WKMG-Channel 6 anchor Justin Warmoth said.

Viewers had been warned Sunday night. WFTV chief meteorologist Tom Terry predicted the hurricane could be to right of forecast path. During "Sunday Night Football," WESH-Channel 2 chief meteorologist Tony Mainolfi warned that the eyewall was shifting toward Orlando.

The explanations: The center was stretching out as it moved north, Mainolfi said. The eye deconstructed, WKMG chief meteorologist Tom Sorrells said. The eye was falling apart but opening like a line, The Weather Channel said, and the outer bands could be as dangerous as the eye.

The TV people found ways to put the story in personal terms. WFTV's Terry said his wife had texted that the lights at home were flickering. WKMG's Sorrells said his family was sitting in the dark playing Battleship. WFTV's Price told of checking in with his wife and children, who were fine.

The widespread Florida damage received extensive coverage on cable news. (Local stations preempted national news broadcasts.) CNN's Chris Cuomo, reporting from Naples, repeated a message to officials: "Use us as a resource." CNN's Sara Sidner told of the beating that Daytona Beach was taking. CNN's John Berman said every population center in the state had been affected by Irma.

Gov. Rick Scott told Fox News Channel that he had talked to President Donald Trump three times on Sunday. "It's still dangerous," he said. "Everybody's got to be patient as we work through this."

David Halstead, former director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, told CNN that Orlando will be crucial in recovery efforts across the state because of the city's central location. – ***Orlando Sentinel***



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