

Looting reported in downtown IC

Staff Writers - The Daily Iowan
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It wasn't only ripped debris and trash that littered downtown Iowa City streets immediately after tornadoes hit Thursday night.

Curious passersby took advantage of the chance to swipe a few free beers from smashed and damaged stores and convenience stations - incidents that many gas-station operators throughout Iowa City's nucleus reported.

"The Liquor House opened up like a can of tuna, and all my friends ran up and started taking liquor," said UI senior Sam Ehlinger as he meandered through the Pedestrian Mall around 10 p.m. Thursday.

Reports of looting and other general chaos were prevalent, but officials said such reports had not been confirmed. Iowa City police Sgt. Doug Hart said that as of late Thursday, officials did not have many details regarding the reported looting.

"That is something we will address," he said.

An employee of the Liquor House - whose back wall had collapsed on a parked car - declined to comment.

"Now's not the time," the employee said.

Later, Liquor House employee James Roe, 22, said the store had no plans to keep watch overnight, deferring instead to nearby police oversight.

"We're feeling all right," he said. "We're concerned to some degree, but we won't be sitting in here with shotguns."

Though officials from the Johnson County Sheriff's Office said they released a statement late Thursday to urge residents to sit tight in their homes, many people cast aside the warnings and curiously surveyed the damage.

J.J. Lewis and his friends sat on the patio of his apartment building, 307 E. College St.

"It was hailing, and there was debris flying everywhere, and it sounded like a train coming through," Lewis said, taking a sip of beer. "We had a case, and we felt bad, but ..."

Emergency officials said the increased traffic and number of peoples parading through the streets created a slight hindrance for workers trying to reach people who had called 911.

"Earlier, it was quite hectic," said Steve Spenler, the director of Johnson County Ambulance Service. "We had a limited number of calls, so we were not adversely affected, but there was a lot of traffic, and it certainly was a hindrance."

"It would be good if people would be encouraged to stay home," he added.

Hart said several things were also being thrown at first responders at one point.

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