

24 dead in West Virginia floods; search and rescue continues

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Clendenin: Surrounded by muddy devastation, Cathy Light and her husband Chris thought it was "heaven sent" they had free burgers to munch on in a Clendenin parking lot.

To their left, the roof of a Dairy Queen slumped to the pavement. Behind it, a trailer home was ripped from its foundation, with four concrete stairs all that remained in the ground. Occasional whiffs of rotten food wafted from a nearby grocery store that, not long ago, was filled with five feet of muck water.

Before they jumped in a rescue boat in Clendenin yesterday, the Lights could only save their dog Odie and a TV that sat atop a bedroom dresser the highest-up they stored anything in their house, really.

The heavy rains that pummeled West Virginia resulted in at least 24 deaths, leaving families homeless with the tearful realization that they're starting from scratch.

"I don't have anything," said Cathy Light, as she ate the free meal provided by Grace Community Church. "Where do we go now?"

The scene in Clendenin, located in Kanawha County, wasn't as deadly as in Ranielle. Sixteen people died in Greenbrier County, at least 15 of them in Ranielle. Greenbrier is the only county where Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin's administration believes people remain missing.

Â Â Â *"It does not appear there are unaccounted for people in other counties, but it's still a somewhat fluid situation," said Chris Stadelman, Tomblin's chief of staff.*

Ranielle Mayor Andrea "Andy" Pendleton wept as she surveyed her town yesterday.

"I weep for my people, I weep for the businesses," she said.

About six buses full of people whose homes were either without power or too damaged to inhabit were evacuated. Some were taken initially to a fire department facility, but then it flooded so they were moved to an abandoned store. When that started to flood, buses took the evacuees to a church 40 miles away.

Search and rescue teams went house to house, marking those checked with a spray-painted 'X.' Abandoned pets were taken to a shelter. A water department filtration system, built with a \$2.6 million loan, was damaged, Pendleton said.

Help came from multiple sources, including two search and rescue teams from Virginia.

- AP