



Touching Down

Hayden Wrecking mobilizes for an emergency demolition after a tornado hits an Amazon fulfillment center in Edwardsville, Illinois.

By Marcella Landri





On the evening of Dec. 10, 2021, an F3 tornado with winds up to 160 mph tore through the southern half of an Amazon fulfillment building in Edwardsville, Illinois, killing six people. Performing a demolition in response to a natural disaster is typically a complex, weighty task, especially when the disaster takes human life, but NDA member Hayden Wrecking Corporation knew what to do and was able to mobilize quickly to the site. Within hours after the tornado struck, the East St. Louis, Illinois-based company had arrived on-site.

The building's general contractor originally contacted Hayden Wrecking to request the services of the company's concrete saw-cutting division to support rescue efforts, but, upon arrival, the assistant fire chief for the city of Edwardsville asked that Hayden Wrecking assess the site and provide recommendations for how to proceed with bringing down the compromised portion of the structure, which was approximately the size of a football field, so that emergency personnel could safely go in for additional rescue and recovery efforts.

"We mobilized our Caterpillar 330D ultra high demolition excavator and

began demolishing the compromised building components on the south portion of the building," says Brian Hayden, vice president of business development at Hayden Wrecking. This involved demolishing sections of precast concrete tilt-up walls that were leaning, as well as the supporting structural steel members that the structural engineers deemed unsafe.

The company used two Caterpillar 336E excavators equipped with rotating sorting grapples to sort through the debris, including "numerous delivery vans inside the footprint of the structure under the direction of emergency personnel as they searched for anyone that still may be trapped," Brian Hayden says.

One of the many challenges encountered during the job was that the tornado had deposited tremendous debris in the water retention basins that needed to be removed. Another contractor was working to drain the basins, but it was

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determined that the soil conditions would not allow for large equipment to safely access the area, so the draining operations ceased.

Hayden Wrecking was then asked to provide a plan to safely remove the debris from the water retention basins.

“Our plan consisted of utilizing a two-person crew in a Jon boat to hook a pull cable to the bar joists and other steel in the water, then retrieve it utilizing a skid steer equipped with a winch to drag the materials to the bank,” Brian Hayden says. “When approval was received to remove material from the site, we scheduled trucks and trailers then proceeded to load out concrete, debris and metals.”

Another big challenge Hayden Wrecking faced was understanding the priorities of all the different entities involved, including the building owner, the tenant,

insurance representatives, structural engineers and the emergency authorities. “We initially were working under the authority of the Edwardsville Fire Department, then we were released to work under the direction of Knight Restoration Services, who was representing the building owner,” Brian Hayden says.

Ultimately, though no one looks forward to emergency demolitions, Hayden Wrecking considers the project a success because there were no safety incidents. “Success to our firm is based upon safety performance and satisfaction from the client, which results in repeat and referral opportunities,” Brian Hayden says. ▶



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