

## Dent Wizard's Hail Division Constantly In Demand, on the Move

By Richard Greene  
Editor

ST. LOUIS – Americans are certainly familiar with violent weather. Hurricanes. Tornadoes. Nor'easters. Blizzards.

Who can possibly forget Katrina and Rita, two queens of monster storms?

But did you know that according to the Multi-Community Environmental Storm Observatory, an estimated 100,000 thunderstorms strike each year in the United States – 10,000 of which are classified as severe? These can produce hail at least 3/4-inch in diameter, along with winds of 58 miles per hour or higher. And the threat of tornadoes is always prevalent. These mighty tempests can strike with ferocity, but with little warning.

RiskMeter.com cited National Climatic Data Center figures in an online report stating that 143,914 hail storms occurred between 1990 and 2004, and MESO's severe weather safety guide conveyed that large hail causes nearly \$1 billion in damage to property and crops annually. While the high plains of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming are the most frequent victims of hail storms, the report noted that any state experiencing thunderstorms can get large hail.

Ask the people of northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri, who on a Sunday in mid-March lived through a horrific storm that produced baseball-sized hail and winds that knocked over airplanes at the downtown Kansas City airport and ripped roofs off homes.

It's these kinds of storms that keep Dent Wizard's rapid-response hail catastrophe division busy.

At a moment's notice, the 800-strong team can be dispatched anywhere around the country to start working on vehicles that suffered hail damage, whether at auctions, at dealership lots, manufacturer plants or holding areas for fleet/lease and rental company vehicles, according to Mike Morrison, Dent Wizard's vice president of hail operations, and Lindsey Bird, vice president of sales.

These specialized hail-damage technicians, who are a combination of company employees and on-call independents, are in addition to the nearly 1,000 Dent Wizard technicians whose core job is to help service virtually all the auctions and about 4,500 dealerships on a given month, repairing and reconditioning

some 2.5 million vehicles a year for remarketing purposes, Morrison and Bird said.

The hail division is a totally different ballgame. "We started our hail division about 10 years ago because there was such an extreme need for these high-volume situations," Morrison noted. "These are acts of God, unscheduled and unexpected. But we have to react to them."

In any given year, Morrison said Dent Wizard's hail division is usually busiest from early April to October. But he added that this year's unseasonably warm winter and less-than-normal snowfall has kicked off the hail season much earlier.

"The past two years have been fairly

report, adding that airport rental car lots also suffered extensive damage.

A news release from Progressive Insurance stated, "To handle the increasing number of claims for broken windshields, dents and other storm-related damage, Progressive has deployed more than 70 members of its catastrophe response team to 10 drive-in claims centers located across Missouri and eastern Kansas."

Dent Wizard's Morrison noted that about 90 technicians were dispatched to Kansas City and 70 more to St. Louis to work with major insurers, dealerships, auctions, manufacturers, body shops, rental car companies and other related commercial firms to help fix damaged vehicles.

Dent Wizard set up 21 repair locations in Kansas City and the surrounding area. And according to Dent Wizard's Web site, the company has partnerships with 42 dealerships throughout Missouri and another eight in Kansas, where individual consumers can have their vehicles repaired at service drives following a hail storm.

Both Bird and Morrison pointed out that Dent Wizard utilizes its innovative and proprietary Paintless Dent Removal process to provide "high quality dent removal to thousands of customers." They explained that Dent Wizard "has over the past two decades researched and developed hundreds of tools to repair dents, dings, creases and hail damage."

"You can't imagine the degree of devastation caused by these violent storms," Bird

explained. "When you look at the damage that can occur on a dealer's lot or at an auction or to a fleet of vehicles or elsewhere, and then consider the major cost to the owner of those vehicles, it's absolutely incredible.

"So, we're proud of our hail division and what these highly trained specialists are able to accomplish to rapidly jump into action and immediately begin to help get these vehicles back to front-line ready condition," Bird added.

Morrison quickly agreed. "We've been very fortunate in that we've never been stretched so thin that we cannot manage all of our commitments and keep our customers happy when all of these storms hit," he said. "But I hope that this early start to hail season isn't a bad omen for what might lie ahead. To be honest, I trust we never find out what circumstances it would take for us to be overstretched and overextended."



Earlier-than-expected hail storms keep Dent Wizard technicians hopping.

quiet, but so far this year, there have been powerful storms in January and February, and this is very unusual," Morrison explained. "As tragic and monumental in scope as Katrina and Rita were last fall, and I'm not at all trying to minimize the devastation that they caused, but somehow hail damage caused each year to the auto industry gets lost in the mix.

"So, Dent Wizard is off to a quick start, as are other companies like ours," he added.

Damage caused by the Kansas/Missouri double whammy was widespread. One auction official, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Auto Remarketing NewsMagazine* that more than 2,500 vehicles were damaged at one facility, and that he had heard that DaimlerChrysler and General Motors cars were hit particularly hard in the area. Both Morrison and Bird confirmed that