

Pandemic? Tornado? Toyota Lends a Hand to a Key Supplier

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Mother Nature severely damaged the plant that's the sole source of the Tundra's transfer case. So, Toyota Purchasing — without hesitation — reached out to help its supplier recover.

BorgWarner is the sole supplier of the transfer case at the heart of the Toyota Tundra's four-wheel drivetrain. Simply put, Toyota can't make its popular full-size pickup truck without it.

Yet that's exactly the scenario that presented itself after BorgWarner's plant in Seneca, South Carolina, was struck by a level F3 tornado on April 13. Tragically, the tornado killed a security guard. It also ripped off the majority of the facility's roof, leading to significant flooding of critical equipment and damage to the production and machining areas of the facility.



Damage Done – Here’s what the BorgWarner plant in Seneca, South Carolina, looked like not long after it was struck by a level F3 tornado.

“It’s fortunate that, because of COVID-19, we weren’t in need of more transfer cases,” says Bob Young, Group Vice President of Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) Purchasing Supplier Development. “And it’s fortunate that only five people were on site in South Carolina when the tornado hit. If all of the auto manufacturers BorgWarner supplies had been at full production, there could have been several hundred workers there.”

Thanks to the extraordinary actions of BorgWarner’s team, supported by more than a dozen Toyota team members and representatives of other manufacturers, BorgWarner Seneca was able to restart production just 500 hours after the incident.

“It’s a true testament to the power of collaboration and teamwork of the employees in Seneca, all of BorgWarner, and our customers,” says Joe McCulloch, manager of BorgWarner’s Seneca plant.

And now Toyota Motor Manufacturing Texas (TMMTX), which in May began ramping back up in the midst of the pandemic, is once again churning out Tundras to try to keep pace with strong customer demand.



***In the Trenches** – Production Engineering’s Pete Waldeck (right) and Purchasing’s Tim Ellsworth (left) work with a BorgWarner maintenance worker to diagnose an electrical issue on an end-of-line measurement machine.*

Young is quick to credit BorgWarner’s resourcefulness for responding to this crisis. Within 48 hours, they had secured the area and had more than 200 contractors on site assessing the damage and developing a game plan to construct an internal structure that could temporarily replace the missing roof.

Young and his team reached out to offer their help and within a week, 17 team members had been dispatched to assist the recovery effort. This included 12 team members from Production Engineering based out of Georgetown, Kentucky, three from Purchasing in Saline, Michigan as well as two from the Quality group at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, who were within a four hour drive of the BorgWarner plant and could more readily represent their counterparts at TMMTX. Many remained on site for nearly three weeks.

Their areas of focus included a safety assessment, equipment triage and recovery, and reconfiguration of the flow of materials within the confines of the damaged facility.

It might seem like Toyota went above and beyond here but Jim Holloway, general manager of TMNA Powertrain Purchasing, doesn’t see it that way.

“There’s a reason why Toyota’s reputation among its supplier base is among the best in the industry,” says Jim. “We don’t just sit in our offices and tell them what we want. We work side by side with our partners, we get our hands dirty. As BorgWarner put it, we are a part of their team.”