

Blizzard brings much of US East Coast to a standstill

January 24 2016, by Seth Borenstein And Jennifer Peltz



Harrison Feind of Boulder, Colo., takes a selfie with a snowman in front of the White House in Washington, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the U.S. East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet (90

centimeters) of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down Washington and New York City.

After days of weather warnings, most of the 80 million people in the storm's path heeded requests to stay home and off the roads, which were largely deserted. Yet at least 18 deaths were blamed on the weather, resulting from car crashes, shoveling [snow](#) and hypothermia. And more snow was to come, with dangerous conditions expected to persist until early Sunday, forecasters warned.

"This is going to be one of those generational events, where your parents talk about how bad it was," Ryan Maue, a meteorologist for WeatherBell Analytics, said from Tallahassee, Florida, which also got some flakes.

The system was mammoth, dropping snow from the Gulf Coast to the northeastern New England states. By afternoon, areas near Washington had surpassed 30 inches (75 centimeters), according to the [weather service](#)'s running totals. The heaviest unofficial report was in a rural area of West Virginia, not far from Harper's Ferry, with 40 inches (100 centimeters).

In addition to snow and wind, the National Weather Service predicted up to half an inch (1.25 centimeters) of ice for the Carolinas and potentially serious coastal flooding for the mid-Atlantic region.



Mike Freidberg, of Newtown, Pa., enjoys cross country skiing during a snowstorm Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016, in Newtown, Pa. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

Airlines canceled nearly 7,000 weekend flights and started to cut Monday service. The bulk of Saturday's 4,459 cancelations were at airports in the New York City and Washington metro areas, according to flight tracking service FlightAware. Another 2,467 flights were canceled for Sunday, and the count keeps rising.

As the storm picked up, forecasters increased their snow predictions for New York and points north. The new estimates were for heavy snow nearly all the way to Boston, forecaster Patrick Burke said from the weather service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

"This is kind of a top 10 snowstorm," said weather service winter storm expert Paul Kocin, who co-wrote a two-volume textbook on blizzards. And for New York and Washington this looks like top 5, he said. "It's a

big one."



Pedestrians walk along the center of Central Park West in New York, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016. A massive winter storm buried much of the U.S. East Coast in a foot or more of snow by Saturday, shutting down transit in major cities, stranding drivers on snowbound highways, knocking out power to tens of thousands of people. (AP Photo/Craig Ruttle)

In New York, three people died while shoveling snow in Queens and Staten Island. The normally bustling streets around Rockefeller Center, Penn Station and other landmarks were mostly empty. Those who did venture out walked down the middle of snow-covered streets to avoid even deeper drifts on the sidewalks.

With Broadway shows dark, thin crowds shuffled through a different kind of Great White Way in Times Square.

As recently as Friday night, New York officials had expected the storm to top out at 18 inches (45 centimeters). But that prediction jumped to 25 inches (62.5 centimeters) Saturday morning and to 28 inches (71 centimeters) by evening. Nearly 20 inches (50 centimeters) had fallen on Central Park by late afternoon, with more coming down hard.



Kristin Maruszewski, walks home from a day of skiing and snowboarding, taking advantage of the snowy weather in Washington, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

Officials imposed a travel ban in the city, ordering all nonemergency vehicles off the roads. Commuter rails and above-ground segments of the nation's biggest subway system shut down too, along with buses.

Cab driver Mian Ayyub said he tried to pick up fares Saturday morning but gave up after getting stuck four times in two hours. Police and passers-by helped get him free.

"I've been driving a cab 28 years, but this looks like the worst." He parked and went home.



Minako Momose, left, of Nagano, Japan, and Yukari Sekiguchi from Tokyo, shield their face from the snow as they walk along 14th Street in northwest Washington, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

In Washington, monuments that would typically be busy with tourists

stood vacant. In the morning, the steps of the Lincoln Memorial had not been cleared off and looked almost like a ski slope. All mass transit in the capital was to be shut down through Sunday.

Drivers skidded off snowy, icy roads in accidents that killed several people as the storm raged Friday and Saturday. Two people died of hypothermia in southwest Virginia. In North Carolina, a man whose car had veered off an icy-covered road was arrested on charges of killing a motorist who stopped to help.

Elsewhere, drivers were marooned for hours on snow-choked highways in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.



A woman walks along K Street in northwest Washington, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

The Temple University women's gymnastics team, Duquesne University's men's basketball team and a church group from Indiana were among travelers who got stuck when the Pennsylvania Turnpike turned into a snowy parking lot.

Father Shaun Whittington said he and his 96 parishioners, mostly teenagers, were on their way home Friday evening from the anti-abortion March for Life in Washington. Snow plows finally arrived just before noon Saturday, Whittington said.

Roofs collapsed on a historic theater in Virginia and a horse barn in Maryland, while seaside towns in New Jersey and Delaware grappled with flooding.



A pedestrian walks south on 13th Street in the blowing snow, Saturday, Jan. 23,

2016 in northwest Washington. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

The snow alone would have been enough to bring the East Coast to a halt. But it was whipped into a maelstrom by winds that reached 75 mph (120 kph) at Dewey Beach, Delaware, and Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, the weather service said.

From Virginia to New York, sustained winds topped 30 mph (48 kph) and gusted to around 50 mph (80 kph), Burke said. The wind was so strong that scientists reported trouble measuring the snow because it sometimes seemed to blow sideways.

And if that weren't enough, the storm also had bursts of thunder and lightning. Forecasters saw lightning out the window of the Weather Prediction Center, where meteorologists were camped out.



As the snow blows, a crew works to free a truck stuck in the snow, Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016 in Washington. A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill Saturday, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down the nation's capital and its largest city. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

Stranded travelers included Defense Secretary Ash Carter, whose high-tech aircraft, known as the Doomsday Plane, couldn't land at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland after returning from Europe. Carter was rerouted to Tampa, Florida, where he planned to wait for better weather.

In its wake, the storm also knocked out electricity to tens of thousands of homes and businesses.



Two people walk south on Eighth Avenue in the Manhattan borough of New York, near Penn Station, during a blizzard Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016, in New York. (AP Photo/David Boe)

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