

2018 starts with record cold in parts of the Midwest

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Steam rises from Lake Superior as the ship St. Clair comes to harbor during some of the coldest temps of the year, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2017, at Canal Park in Duluth, Minn. The St. Clair is a self-unloader built in 1976 at Sturgeon Bay, Wis., and is 770 feet long and has 26 hatches that open into 5 cargo holds, providing a load capacity of 45,000 tons. (David Joles/Star Tribune via AP)

Bone-chilling cold gripped much of the central U.S. as 2018 began Monday, breaking low temperature records, icing over some New Year's

celebrations and leading to at least two deaths attributed to exposure to the elements.

The National Weather Service issued wind chill advisories covering a vast area from South Texas to Canada and from Montana through New England. In Chicago, it was even too cold for those hearty enough to ring in the new year by jumping into Lake Michigan, where thick white steam rose from the water Monday morning.

Organizers of an annual Polar Plunge event threw in the towel because they say an arctic blast that pushed temperatures below zero made jumping into the lake too dangerous. Would-be plungers instead had their pictures taken while jumping on the frozen beach—in their swimsuits.

"I'm not happy about it. But I was down by the lake and, gosh, if you were dropped in there, it'd take you 10 minutes to get out," Jeff Coggins, an event organizer, told WBBM-TV.

Dangerously low temperatures also enveloped several other Midwest states, including parts of Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska, along with nearly all of Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota.

In Nebraska, temperatures hit 15 below zero (-26 Celsius) before midnight Sunday in Omaha, breaking a record low dating to 1884. Omaha officials cited the forecast in postponing the 18th annual New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular that draws around 30,000 people.



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It was colder in Des Moines, where city officials closed a downtown outdoor ice skating plaza and said it wouldn't reopen until the city emerged from sub-zero temperatures. The [temperature](#) hit 20 below zero (-29 Celsius) early Monday, with the wind chill dipping to negative 31 degrees (-35 Celsius).

The mercury also plunged to a record-breaking minus 32 (-36 Celsius) in Aberdeen, South Dakota, where the previous New Year's Day record had stood for 99 years.

The wind chill dipped to 36 below zero (-38 Celsius) in Duluth, Minnesota, a city known for its bitter cold winters. In northeast Montana, the wind chill readings dipped as low as minus 58 (-50 Celsius).



April Nickila and Christina Liesmaki try to stay warm while waiting in subzero temperatures to enter U.S. Bank Stadium to watch an NFL football game between the Chicago Bears and Minnesota Vikings, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2017, in Minneapolis. (Carlos Gonzalez/Star Tribune via AP)

Despite a warning from the local fire chief about hypothermia, Milwaukee's loosely organized annual Polar Bear Plunge into Lake Michigan proceeded Monday with temperatures just above freezing. At least one other similar event in a nearby Wisconsin city was canceled.

Plunging overnight temperatures in Texas brought rare snow flurries as far south as Austin, and accidents racked up on icy roads across the state. In the central Texas city of Abilene, the local police chief said more than three dozen vehicle crashes were reported in 24 hours.

It's even cold in the Deep South, a region more accustomed to brief bursts of arctic air than night after night below zero. Frozen pipes and dead car batteries were concerns from Louisiana to Georgia as overnight temperatures in the teens were predicted across the region by Monday night.

The Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's office said two bodies found Sunday showed signs of hypothermia. They included a man in his 50s found on the ground in an alley and a 34-year-old man. Autopsies are being performed on both men. Police believe the cold weather may have been a factor in the death of a man in Bismarck, North Dakota, whose body was found near a river.



People visit a snow-covered Cloud Gate at Millennium Park in Chicago, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2017. Bitter cold temperatures are affecting parts of the U.S. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

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