

Deadly winter storm blankets eastern US in snow

February 18 2021, by Peter Hutchison With Francois Picard In Houston



A man shovels snow in New York on February 18, 2021

A deadly winter weather system that brought record-busting cold to the southern and central United States, knocking out power for millions in oil-rich Texas, blanketed the East Coast in snow Thursday, disrupting

coronavirus vaccinations.

The historic frigid blast has over the past week seen Arctic cold envelope much of the US sun belt unfamiliar with such extremes, leaving dozens of dead in its wake and several million Texans told to boil water before consuming it.

On Thursday, a major winter storm impacted an area stretching from Virginia up to the Northeast, bringing icy buildups and treacherous travel conditions, according to the National Weather Service.

Snow fell steadily across New York City throughout the day, forcing the cancelation of about 200 flights and delaying the opening of two COVID-19 vaccination sites after the storm disrupted dosage delivery.

By 4:50 pm (2150 GMT), meteorologists had recorded more than four inches (ten centimeters) of snow in lower Manhattan.

The Big Apple has already been blanketed by the white stuff twice this winter during two separate storms.

"The occasional snowstorm is always good but as we're getting closer to March it gets a little tiring. I'm ready for it to start being warm again," said 18-year-old student Kara Dickson.



A resident in Waco, Texas clears snow as the oil-rich state struggles to cope with a historic cold snap

A weather warning was in effect in New Jersey, where Governor Phil Murphy announced the temporary closure of several vaccination sites.

Across Texas, which has been hardest hit by the cold snap, utility companies were gradually restoring power though more than 250,000 homes and businesses remained without electricity late Thursday, according to PowerOutage.us.

Even as the lights came back on, some Texas residents were dealing with

the misery of water pipes that had burst in the frigid temperatures.

"It was like a waterfall was coming down and it was starting to come out of the bathroom and to the other rooms," said Birgit Kamps of Houston.

"We grabbed buckets and towels, tried to mop it up before it started flooding the house," she said, adding that a neighbor helped switch off the water at the break, leaving her without running water.

Water pressure problems meant nearly seven million Texans were being advised to boil their water before drinking it or using for cooking, said Toby Baker, who heads the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, adding that nearly 264,000 people were impacted by non-operational water systems.



Men are seen outside of the Lincoln Memorial under a blanket of light snow in Washington, DC on February 18, 2021

'Failed state'

Texas power companies implemented rolling blackouts to avoid grids being overloaded as residents cranked up the heat. The surge in demand came as generating capacity dropped thanks to power stations and wind turbines freezing.

David Hernandez, 38, spent the night at a Houston church with other people who had fled their homes.

"My car got stranded and I was trying to sleep in the car but it was just too cold," he said.

Texas authorities opened about 300 emergency "warming centers" across the state.

President Joe Biden spoke Thursday evening with Texas Governor Greg Abbott, pledging that the federal government would work "hand-in-hand" with state authorities to offer relief, the White House said.

Texas's woes have sparked outrage in the Lone Star State, the only one of the US's 48 continental states to have its own independent power grid.



A woman poses in New York's Times Square during a winter storm on February 18, 2021

Anger soared Thursday after it was revealed Texas Senator Ted Cruz had flown to the Mexican holiday resort of Cancun during the crisis.

As political rivals called for his resignation, Cruz justified the flight by saying his one-night stay was to drop his children off before he flew home.

He later called the trip "obviously a mistake."

Even though the Arctic air mass was beginning to loosen its grip on

Texas and the south, frigid temperatures were expected to continue.

Biden ordered the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate disaster relief efforts in Oklahoma and Louisiana after local officials declared emergencies.

Biden was forced to postpone until Friday a visit to the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing site in Kalamazoo, Michigan while federal government offices in Washington were closed Thursday.

More than 30 storm-related deaths have been reported by US media since the cold weather arrived last week, many in traffic accidents.



More than 500,000 Texas homes and businesses remained without electricity Thursday morning

Animal deaths

Houston police said a woman and a girl died from carbon monoxide poisoning after sitting in a car in a garage with the engine running to keep warm.

Emergency medical authorities around Texas said dozens of others have been treated for suspected carbon monoxide poisoning.

A dozen animals—including one 58-year-old female chimpanzee—died during the freeze at rescue sanctuary Primarily Primates near San Antonio, the organization said on its website.

The winter storm has spawned at least four tornadoes, according to Atlanta-based weather.com, including one in North Carolina on Monday that killed at least three people and injured 10.

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