

Early snowstorm wreaks havoc with northeast US

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A record early snowfall led to the declaration of states of emergency in the states of New Jersey, Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as large parts of New York State. The storm brought significant snowfall to New York City in October for only the fourth time since the American Civil War of 150 years ago.

Coming only two months after Hurricane Irene (later downgraded to a tropical storm), the latest extreme weather underscored the inadequate and decayed state of much of the U.S. infrastructure, especially the electrical grid. Once again, millions were left without power, and many will have to wait days to have it restored. In some areas of the Northeast, the impact of the snowstorm was even worse than that of this summer's tropical storm, which caused dozens of deaths and billions of dollars of damage.

Schools were closed throughout the region, with many closings expected to last at least until the middle of the week. Halloween observances, scheduled for October 31, were postponed in many areas.

At least twelve deaths have so far been attributed to the latest storm, which hit on October 29. It followed a northeast path and left significant snowfall throughout the region, with the biggest impact in a narrower band that stretched from interior Pennsylvania through New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts and up into New Hampshire and Maine. Plainfield, Massachusetts, near the Berkshire Mountains in the western part of the state, reported 30.8 inches of snow. West Milford, New Jersey, only 45 miles northwest of New York City, reported 31.4 inches.

Bradley International Airport, serving the Connecticut state capital of Hartford, had 12 inches, compared to a previous record for the date of less than half an inch. Passengers on a Jet Blue flight were stuck

on the tarmac for seven hours.

Dozens of motorists were trapped in their cars for up to 10 hours in suburban Dutchess and Putnam Counties, 50 to 70 miles north of New York City. Along with the snowfall, the storm brought huge winds, leading to downed trees, blocked roads and downed electrical wires. Commuter rail service was severely disrupted in many areas. In New York City, Central Park got only 1.3 inches of snow, still a record for the date and for the month. Even though the amount was still relatively small, the storm's arrival while most trees had not yet lost their leaves meant tremendous weight and very widespread damage. Local officials said about 1,000 trees may be lost to the storm in Central Park, compared to a much lower figure of 125 trees lost due to Tropical Storm Irene.

At least 400,000 homes lost power in New York, 650,000 in Massachusetts, 280,000 in New Hampshire and 800,000 in Connecticut. The Connecticut total surpassed the figure for the tropical storm, which had a devastating impact that lasted for weeks. Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy said after the latest storm, "We are expecting extensive and long-term power outages."

The *New York Times* interviewed one expert on the relation between the recent extreme weather and global warming. As he explained, one winter storm, even if record-setting and unprecedented in its early arrival, does not prove climate change, but the pattern of recent extreme weather and precipitation, including cold snaps, is very much in line with the scientific understanding that the warming of the oceans is sending more moisture into the air. Precipitation in New York City for the past 365 days stands at more than 72 inches, for instance, compared to an average total of about 48 inches.

While there is obviously no way to entirely prevent weather-related damage, the recent spate of disasters highlights the lack of long-term planning that increasingly characterizes American capitalism and its long-term decline. The unpreparedness is made worse by the growing neglect of public and social services in recent decades. The privatization of virtually all sections of economic life, combined with the indifference and hostility to investments that do not turn an immediate profit, and the unanimous ruling class opposition to public works spending in the face of mass unemployment, has helped to create the current state of affairs. (See “Hurricane Irene and the decay of US infrastructure”)



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