

Hurricane Sandy leaves 8 million without power in US

Kate Randall
31 October 2012

Hurricane Sandy came ashore in New Jersey Monday evening and steamed inland on Tuesday, delivering punishing winds, rain and snow. The US death toll rose to 40, with many of the victims killed by falling trees. More than 8 million people were left without power.

Before making its way up the Eastern Seaboard, Sandy killed at least 69 people in the Caribbean. The majority of these deaths were in Haiti, where hundreds of thousands of people remain homeless or in abject poverty nearly three years after an earthquake struck the nation.

After Hurricane Sandy made landfall, the storm merged with a winter system coming from the west, both fed by cold air from Canada, creating what many dubbed a “superstorm.” The impact was felt across a 1,000-mile-wide area, toppling trees in New England and crashing waves off Lake Michigan in Chicago.

Sandy took its most brutal toll on New York City, as a 13-foot storm surge, some 3 feet higher than the previous record, flooded Lower Manhattan. More than 600,000 people remained without power throughout the city’s five boroughs as of Tuesday, including as many as a quarter million in Manhattan alone. Mayor Michael Bloomberg said it could be three days or more before power is restored.

Transportation in the largest US city ground to a halt. It is unclear when the subways, which shut down Sunday in advance of the storm, will be able to resume operation. While the mayor gave an optimistic estimate of four or five days, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) spokeswoman Majorie Anders stated bluntly, “We have no idea how long it’s going to take.”

The storm flooded six subway tunnels between

Manhattan and Brooklyn, plus a seventh linking Manhattan and Queens. The surge of salt water inundated signals and switches, electrified third rails, and covered tracks with sludge and debris. During the height of the storm, some subway cars were photographed with water at platform level. Once the extensive repairs have been made, transit workers will have to walk the hundreds of miles of track to inspect it. Amtrak train service was also cancelled along the Northeast corridor.

The New York area’s three international airports—LaGuardia, JFK and Newark—remain closed, wreaking havoc on air travel not only in the Northeast region, but throughout the country. A quarter of all US flights travel to or from these airports each day. Some 16,000 flights have been cancelled and the number is growing. Television footage showed LaGuardia runways still covered in water. Lighting, signals and other safety equipment may have been damaged.

The New York Stock Exchange remained closed for a second day on Tuesday, the first time since the late nineteenth century, but was expected to reopen Wednesday. Classes were cancelled for some 4.7 million public school students. Broadway theaters were closed; Central Park was blocked off. People were evacuated from hotels in midtown Manhattan as a construction crane dangled precariously atop a luxury high-rise.

At least 10 people died in New York City as a result of downed electrical wires, falling trees and debris, or by drowning. When a generator failed Monday night at New York University’s Tisch Hospital, staff members were forced to evacuate 200 patients—including 20 babies in neonatal intensive care, breathing with the aid of battery-powered respirators—to waiting ambulances to be taken to other hospitals.

More than 80 homes were destroyed early Tuesday morning when a fire broke out in the Breezy Point neighborhood of Queens. Firefighters waded through chest-high water to reach stranded residents, many of whom had to be rescued by boat. Pockets of embers continued to burn Tuesday morning and electrical wires dangled precariously near the street.

In neighboring New Jersey, more than 2 million people are without power. Many roads and bridges are closed and mass transit is at a standstill. Governor Chris Christie estimated that it could be at least 10 days before PATH trains between New Jersey and Lower Manhattan are restored to service.

About 5,500 New Jersey residents are in shelters, and first responders continue to rescue people from flooded areas. Hundreds of people were stranded when floodwaters swept through the small towns of Moonachie and Little Ferry. Fifty to 60 people were rescued by boat Tuesday morning from a mobile-home park in Moonachie after a berm was breached overnight.

Three nuclear plants shut down in New York and New Jersey, and two others have curtailed their operations. PSEG Nuclear shut down a unit of its plant in Salem, in southern New Jersey, after problems with circulating water pumps. In Buchanan, New York, Entergy Nuclear shut down its Indian Point Unit 3 due to external electrical grid issues.

Some 1.2 million were left without power in Pennsylvania at the height of the storm. Utility PECO Energy, which serves Philadelphia and its suburbs, said it could take up to a week to restore power. More than 350,000 lost power in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia.

In Connecticut, the storm flooded roads and damaged homes from Groton to Greenwich, and left more than 600,000 utility customers without power. Governor Dannel Malloy urged residents stranded by rising waters to move to their roofs, saying, "This is a Katrina-like warning we are issuing." Three people have died in the state, including a volunteer firefighter.

Massachusetts utilities reported some 270,000 customers without power as of midday Tuesday,

including extensive outages in the central part of the state. National Grid, NStar and other utility companies are already facing millions of dollars in fines over their poor response to hurricanes and snowstorms last year. National Grid spokesperson Charlotte McCormack commented to the media, "We don't have any timelines for power being restored at this time."

Blizzard conditions spun off the edge of superstorm Sandy Tuesday, with wet snow and high winds hitting parts of West Virginia and neighboring Appalachian states. More than a foot of snow was reported in lower elevations of West Virginia, and at least 236,000 customers were without power in the state as of early Tuesday. Parts of the Virginia Highlands, northeast Tennessee and northwest North Carolina were also affected by the storm.

The widespread damage wrought by Sandy is spread across 12 states. Initial estimates place property damage at \$20 billion, with \$10 billion to \$30 billion more in lost business, according to HIS Global Insight, a forecasting firm.

The area affected accounts for about a quarter of the national gross domestic product. Paul Ashworth, chief US economic at Capital Economics, estimates this works out to about \$13 trillion a day in economic output.

The region includes New York City, the nerve center of the world financial system. Uncertainty about the ability to restore the city's crippled transit system and infrastructure threatens not only incalculable damage to the economy, but hardship for workers and residents that is difficult to measure in the immediate aftermath of the storm.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact