

Death toll climbs to 49 in US snowstorm

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The death toll from last weekend's blizzard in the eastern United States climbed to 49 on Wednesday, according to the latest press reports, as the region struggles to bring its decaying infrastructure, devastated by repeated budget cuts, to something like working order.

The fatalities over the weekend follow closely the deaths of more than two dozen people from flooding along the Mississippi River at the beginning of the year, as well as the deaths of eleven people from tornadoes in the Dallas, Texas area late last December. The fact that such severe (but not uncommon) weather in the wealthiest country in the world routinely results in such widespread death and destruction exposes the rot of official American society, which spares no expense when it comes to criminal wars abroad but which is somehow unable to provide for needed infrastructure for the American population as a whole.

The majority of the deaths, which were documented by the Associated Press, were entirely preventable, some of them even senseless. At least fifteen people died of cardiac arrest while shoveling snow outside their homes. Most of these people were middle-aged or elderly, but the figure also includes a pregnant 18-year-old woman in Pennsylvania. Three people were killed after being either being covered in snow or struck by snowplows.

Seven people were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning while seeking shelter from the cold. At least five people died of carbon monoxide poisoning after retreating to their cars for warmth, when the exhaust pipes became clogged with snow. In South Carolina, an elderly couple died of carbon monoxide poisoning after resorting to a generator to heat their home, which had lost power during the storm. Seven people in Northern Virginia were hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning in their own apartments after the vents for the building's ground floor furnace became blocked

with snow.

The response of the political establishment was not to prepare ahead of time for what is becoming, in part due to man-made global warming, an increasingly routine event in this part of the country. Instead, as always during a public emergency in the United States, they deployed the military. Thousands of National Guard troops were mobilized as part of the states of emergency declared in 11 states last week, including 1,200 in Virginia and Maryland alone. Some states issued travel bans and threatened people with arrest if they were found attempting to drive motor vehicles. Days after the storm itself, states of emergency still remain in force in eight states. A state of emergency in Washington, DC was lifted at 6:30 Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, an ongoing commuter nightmare continues in the nation's capital. As of this writing, Washington's public transit system, the Metro, still remains at much reduced service levels, five days after being shut down entirely in anticipation of the storm. While all lines of the Metro's subway system were finally restored by Wednesday morning, almost half of the city's 300 bus lines remained closed. However, even on the open lines officials "warned of possible delays and detours," according to the *Washington Post*. Conditions for DC motorists are little better. While the city hoped "to have at least one lane open on all streets by Wednesday morning," officials conceded that "they may not get to all of them," the *Post* reported.

The Metro's infrastructure has become increasingly decrepit and unsafe due to constant cuts to maintenance and improvements. In January of last year one person was killed and more than 80 injured when smoke filled a stalled Metro subway car after an electrical failure. Last August, an unoccupied train derailed during the morning rush hour, resulting in the closure of three of the system's six subway lines.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)

gave the Metro system a “D” in its 2013 Report Card, citing a then-\$16 billion dollar funding gap (the nation as a whole received a “D+” in the report). Instead of fully funding the city’s public transit network, however, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed a bill last summer that would have slashed federal funding for the subway system by \$50 million, or one-third. While these cuts were restored to their previous levels in the eventual five-year transportation bill signed by President Obama in December, overall spending on infrastructure remains well below the \$3.6 trillion needed by 2020, according to the ASCE.

Twenty Washington, DC-area school districts remained closed on Wednesday, with seven school districts announcing closures for Thursday as well. While DC Public Schools reopened on Wednesday, school officials told parents to “use discretion” when deciding whether to send their children to school, and said that it would excuse all absences.

However, cafeterias at ten DC schools opened on Monday in order to feed impoverished students, many of whom would otherwise have struggled to find a meal. One school official estimated that between 75 and 80 percent of all public school students in the city qualified for free or reduced-price meals, an indication of the extreme levels of poverty facing working-class youth.



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