

Over 20 dead in winter storm as US cold wave continues

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Following extreme weather patterns along the eastern coast of the US, a massive winter storm has claimed over 20 lives, according to various media reports.

“While conditions have begun to improve across the northeastern US, the arctic surge is already underway accompanied by brisk winds at times,” the National Weather Service (NWS) warned. “Dangerously low wind chill temperatures are to be expected the next couple of days with some blowing snow possible.”

The storm has wreaked havoc along the East Coast in the form of snowstorms, rising tides causing mass floods, and harsh cold. The NWS is predicting a record-breaking streak in low temperatures across the US.

Boston broke its high tide record, not seen since 1921, at 4.88 MHHW (Mean Higher High Water). Videos of floods posted by Boston residents went viral on social media Friday, showing firefighters trudging through partially frozen salt water, and home appliances swept away in the rising tidewaters. Some roads were blocked off as impassable. Suffolk County, Massachusetts reported at least 75 homes with flood damage to the first floor. One Arlington water department employee was found in a snow bank after suffering from cardiac arrest during storm cleanup.

School districts across the country remained closed through Friday, though many are expected to reopen on Monday.

The Department of Defense deployed 500 National Guard troops to the East Coast as an emergency response, with 200 going to New York. By Thursday afternoon, the Queens borough of New York City had reported 13 inches of snow.

Meanwhile, cold weather brutalized a huge swath of the US Midwest and South, with temperatures well below normal in most areas. Deaths attributed to the cold have been reported from a wide variety of causes,

with the poorer and most vulnerable sections of the population the most harshly affected.

News sources report that across the state of Wisconsin nine people have died in cold-related incidents since the onset of the present weather pattern. Three occurred in the city of Milwaukee alone including a 60-year-old woman found dead in her garage and a 51-year-old man found frozen in a van. Three more people died in Dane County, which encompasses the state capital of Madison. In one case a 57-year-old man was found dead in a parking structure. In another an 84-year-old woman suffering from dementia was found outside.

In Chicago, a man was found unresponsive in the Palmer Woods neighborhood on Thursday. The 59-year-old man, whose name has not been released, was found by paramedics responding to an emergency call. It was the sixth cold death since autumn in Cook County Illinois, which encompasses Chicago.

Meanwhile, homeless shelters report being overwhelmed by the outbreak of cold weather. On January 1, 2018 60,000 people slept in New York City shelters. At the same time, New York City police have been reported forcing homeless people out of subways, one of the few places it is possible to stay warm in the brutally cold weather.

The cold has been blamed for the deaths of at least three homeless men in Texas and North Carolina according to news reports. In another case a homeless man in Saint Louis was found frozen in a trash bin on Monday night.

Homelessness is on the rise across the United States, compounding the impact of the cold. According to federal survey data released last month 553,742 people were without shelter on a given night in 2017. “It’s really a matter of life and death,” one shelter

spokesperson in Boston told the Reuters news agency.

Some large cities have been largely unable to keep up with the needs of the most vulnerable sections of the population in the weather crisis. The city of Detroit is requesting donations for assistance after it opened up three additional emergency warming centers due to overcrowding at shelters. Working with local churches and religious groups, the centers are sending volunteers out over the weekend to locations where homeless communities congregate, in an effort to bring them to the various shelters. Most of the city's shelters are at capacity and are forced to turn away those seeking shelter who arrive late.

While homeless people are the worst affected by severe weather conditions, many need shelter due to insufficient heating in their apartments, or need somewhere warm to sleep if they cannot afford their heating bill.

In the early morning hours of New Year's Day in Detroit, one homeless man was found dead presumably from the cold at Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church on the city's near east side. The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed his identity to the WSWS on Thursday. Dwayne Johnson, 50 years old, had apparently been turned away from another local emergency shelter due to lack of beds and had likely gone to the church seeking refuge from the cold.

On Wednesday night in Shelby Township, a northern suburb of Detroit, a 65-year-old woman suffering from dementia wandered from her home at some point in the night. Her husband noticed she was missing when he awoke at 6 am. According to police reports, she succumbed to the cold and was found dead on a nearby bike path in her slippers and robe later that day.

Also on Wednesday in Orion Township, another northern suburb of Detroit, a 63-year-old woman was discovered by her son and grandchildren face down in the snow in the driveway in front of her home. The cause of death was hypothermia, but it was unclear if she had fallen or if she suffered from other medical conditions previously.



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