Texas reports 111 dead from February winter storm that knocked out power and water for millions

Trévon Austin
26 March 2021

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) reported the official statewide death toll from winter storm Uri now stands at 111. This surpasses the 103 deaths attributed to Hurricane Harvey in 2017, one of worst disasters in Texas history.

The reported deaths occurred between February 11 and March 5, with the majority being associated with hypothermia. The DSHS stated the first deaths from the extreme weather came toward the beginning of February, but due to long-term effects, some Texans succumbed to illness and injury as late as March 11. Texas workers continue to grapple with the physical and economic devastation along with an enduring emotional toll.

Deaths related to the storm had a range of causes. Most victims succumbed to hypothermia amid record low temperatures, such as an 11-year-old boy who froze to death in his family's bed in Conroe. The storm caused many other kinds of deaths as well, including accidents on frozen roads, falls and fires. Some people's medical equipment stopped working without power and others died of carbon monoxide poisoning as they desperately tried to heat their homes or keep warm in their cars.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo called it a "disaster within a disaster," stating there were at least 300 calls regarding carbon monoxide poisoning in her county, which includes Houston, the fourth largest city in the US.

The new death count is nearly twice what officials estimated last week and will likely continue to grow. Locales such as Tarrant County, which includes Fort Worth, have yet to report any deaths related to the storm.

Harris County reported 31 deaths, more than in any other county. Travis County, home of the state capital Austin, saw nine deaths. Galveston County saw six deaths, and the rest were scattered in 47 other counties around Texas.

The latest DSHS report includes three deaths in Dallas County, the county's first confirmed deaths. The county's medical examiner is investigating as many as 17 deaths that could be related to the storm. Officials fear an accurate number will never be available.

Texas was devastated when the state's power grid collapsed because of the frigid temperatures and a record demand for electricity. More than 4 million homes and businesses lost power at the height of the crisis. As the temperatures dropped, the demand for electricity soared, all while supply plummeted as power facilities started falling offline. Millions lost access to water in their homes for days on end, forced to queue for supplies in frigid temperatures.

The storm spread ice and snow over nearly all the state, crippling power generation and forcing millions to weather the conditions in dark and poorly insulated homes. Even after the storm passed and temperatures rose, it took days for power to return and even longer for water service to be restored across the state.

February's brutal winter storm exposed the criminality of the state government, which worked with power companies to block regulation of the power grid in the interest of profits. The state's grid was so strained that the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) stated Texas was merely five minutes away from a complete collapse of the grid before the decision to deploy rolling blackouts, which would have taken weeks or months to repair.

© World Socialist Web Site

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site