

Michigan firefighter dies from downed power line as massive winter storm hits continental US

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23 February 2023

A massive high-impact winter storm stretched across the entire US on Wednesday and Thursday, putting 75 million people under severe weather alerts and knocking electrical power out for more than 1 million.

Ethan Quillen, a 28-year-old volunteer firefighter and lieutenant with the fire department of Paw Paw, Michigan, died after he came into contact with a high voltage power line while responding to a downed tree in Almena Township.

The National Weather Service (NWS) warned that the sprawling storm will impact every region of the 48 states in the continental US with snow, ice, rain, severe thunderstorms and extreme temperatures.

The winter storm is so large that the NWS issued a blizzard warning for Southern California for the first time in 34 years that will last through Saturday. Meanwhile, for the first time ever, the NWS office in San Diego issued a blizzard warning for the San Bernardino County mountains saying, “Travel will be very difficult to impossible due to the extremely heavy snow and extremely high winds expected,” in a Twitter post.

The NWS website short-range forecast said, “While heavy snow and strong winds will tend to dominate the headlines for this winter storm, one other major concern will be the threat of heavy rainfall and flooding for some of the immediate coastal ranges of Southern California below the snow level.”

Meanwhile, new record high temperatures for February were being set or approached in the Southeastern US and as far north as Ohio as the mercury hit the 80s Fahrenheit. Scientists have made it clear that the two weather events this week and the increasing frequency of such extreme events is being

driven by the emission of industrial green house gasses.

“Whenever we get these events, we should always be thinking there’s the possibility or likelihood that human-induced climate change is increasing the likelihood of strange weather,” Richard Seager, climate researcher at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University, told CNN. “The more it goes on, the more they can bring such tremendous damage.”

More than 24 million people in two dozen states were under severe winter weather warnings while another 49 million faced wind chill and frost advisories. Hundreds of schools, businesses and government offices were closed on Wednesday and Thursday across the northern US.

Nearly 1 million people were without electrical power on Thursday in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and New York. According to Poweroutage.us, more than 822,000 of those without power were in Michigan, where a heavy layer of ice accumulated on trees and power lines, combined with wind gusts between 30 and 40 miles per hour, taking down power infrastructure in the southern half of the state’s lower peninsula from Grand Rapids to Detroit.

Power outages and downed trees also struck southwestern Ontario in Canada, with ice coating a stretch from Windsor to Niagara Falls.

In Buffalo, New York, officials warned of power outages impacting residential areas and rendering street lights inoperable. More than 17,000 power outages were reported across the state of New York of Thursday evening.

As of this writing, FlightAware.com reported 2,134 cancelled flights and 16,942 flight delays for Thursday

alone. Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport was hit by 13 inches of snowfall since Tuesday, and most of the state of Minnesota had a foot of snow by Thursday afternoon. Flight cancellations were concentrated in Boston, Detroit, Milwaukee, Portland, Oregon and Toronto, Ontario, in Canada.

The loss of electricity for hundreds of thousands in Michigan—a regular occurrence in the tenth most populous state in the country every time there is a storm of any kind—in the middle of winter is devastating for the state’s working class population.

The Detroit-based corporate media is focusing exclusively on the public relations campaigns mounted by the two energy companies responsible, DTE Energy and Consumers Energy, claiming that power will be restored for 95 percent of those without electricity by Sunday.

However, the anger and frustration of the public is finding expression on social media platforms with responses from members of the public denouncing the energy monopolies for repeated power outages and the excuses being provided by the highly profitable corporations.

Responding to a tweet from DTE Energy telling the public, “don’t go outside today,” one resident said, “It’s almost colder inside than it is outside. Not sure how much longer I’m gonna last in here.” Another Twitter user wrote, “Worst update ever how about when power will be back on. It’s going to be 17 degrees tonight! @DTE_Energy should be ashamed of themselves.”

On the same day that more than half a million of their customers were without power, DTE Energy had no problem publishing a press release announcing “strong financial results” of \$1.1 billion in earnings for 2022 or “\$5.52 per diluted share” for its investors.

Apparently not noticing the contradiction between his words and the present reality facing the public, DTE Energy Chairman, President and CEO Jerry Norcia said, “We are well-positioned to continue building a brighter future for our customers, communities and our employees in 2023.”

A report from WoodTV in Grand Rapids said that Paw Paw volunteer fireman Lt. Ethan Quillen and his crew were called to the 42000 block of 30th Street near 42nd Avenue in Almena Township around 5:45 p.m. Wednesday on a report of a tree that fell onto a power

line.

Fire Chief Jim DeGross said, “The original power line was handled. A tree broke further down on the line and brought a more high voltage line down and when it happened, it snaked and there was no way to get away from it. Nothing that any human did or he did was wrong.”

Chief DeGross described Quillen, saying, “He was a great guy. Father, husband, volunteered his time here for free, gave his life for free. Just the best.”



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