Heavy snowfall across United States from the Plains to the Mid-Atlantic region leaves 7 dead

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Winter Storm Blair, the first major snowfall of the new year, left considerable portions of the United States covered in snow and ice during the first week of 2025. The snowfall, which originated in the US Pacific Northwest and pushed southward, covered the Plains region and made its way to the eastern seaboard by Sunday.

Over 64 million people in the US were placed under various states of emergency during the course of the weekend. Hazardous conditions on roads and freezing temperatures led to seven known fatalities. Closures, canceled flights and other economic disruptions plagued cities and towns in the storm's path. Schools in 20 different states were closed or delayed.

By Saturday morning, meteorologists reported "many, many accidents" across metro Wichita in Kansas. The most severe resulted in two deaths after a sports utility vehicle lost control and rolled down an elevated highway embankment near Wichita. Northeast Kansas saw the heaviest accumulation of snow, counting 18 inches in some areas in less than a day.

In Texas, a Houston man was found frozen to death at a bus stop. The unidentified person had apparently been seeking shelter from the wind, as temperatures of about 30 degrees Fahrenheit were made to feel much lower. In Missouri, a 61-year-old man was killed by a dump truck as it lost control on the roadway.

Snowfall, ice and winds led to considerable power losses throughout the country. A total of 300,000 consumers lost heating and lights as of Monday. The heaviest concentration of outages occurred in Texas, with over 200,000 reported. Virginia and West Virginia each reported over 100,000 power outages.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, representing customer-owned utilities services, reported nearly 100,000 outages impacting various units. Electricity cooperatives are more susceptible to power outages due to serving rural-based and often isolated communities.

Infrastructure was also impacted. Rail operator BNSF reported Monday that its "Winter Action Plan" had been put into effect until Wednesday following a derailment that occurred near Congo, Missouri.

The plan includes restrictions on railcar length to "to enhance train braking performance" and other measures, most of which would be borne by rail workers themselves, charged with clearing the packed snow from the tracks.

Areas of upstate New York received as much as several feet of snow. Washington D.C. saw about 5.5 inches of snow, while the capital's Maryland and Virginia suburbs received almost double that amount. In Virginia, a 32-year-old man died in Sussex County near the town of Wakefield after his truck struck a tree.

Richmond, the Virginia state capital, was placed under a boil water advisory after a water pump failure occurred following a power outage. The failure has affected roughly 230,000 people. According to the city, the advisory must remain in place for at least 24-48 hours.

Richmond has recently faced a series of infrastructure incidents, requiring the federal Department of Transportation to step in and offer the city $60 million in aid to replace its aging gas pipelines. According to the *Richmond Free Press*, the 50 miles of pipelines being addressed "are estimated to be over 170 years old." That is, they date back to the period just before the American Civil War.

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In the nation's capital, Washington D.C., the homeless population has seen a double-digit growth in the past year, up to over 5,500 individuals. This is part of a national trend which is in itself the product of the Biden administration's war on the working class. The *Washington Post* notes "as of Monday afternoon, 220 out of the city's 1,700 or so shelter beds were still available." This represents less than half of the city's needy.

In Houston, where a homeless man is believed to have frozen to death, the city's local ABC News affiliate stated that the region's homeless population "is gearing up for what will be a tough overnight fight against the elements."

The snow storm did not impact Congress's meeting to install the fascist president-elect Donald Trump into the White House on Monday by tallying electoral votes. Trump's main financial backer and co-leader of the incoming administration's so-called "Department of Government Efficiency," the world's richest man, Elon Musk, has referred to anti-homelessness government programs as wasteful, implying they will be cut once the new administration takes office.

The winter storm currently impacting the United States is the product of the polar vortex, where arctic air has escaped the North Pole and descended into lower latitudes. This is directly related to climate change and global warming.

"These [types] of polar vortex disruptions—stretching or moving entirely out of the North Pole—are happening more frequently," writes the Associated Press. With the "Arctic … warming four times faster than the rest of the world … the difference between temperatures up north and down south are shrinking. … That means more energy bouncing off and warping or moving the polar vortex," it notes, citing a recent study by several climate researchers.

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