

Bitter cold across much of US

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As many as 140 million people in the United States and Canada are suffering through record low temperatures in the wake of a storm that dropped almost two feet of snow in some places at the end of last week. As of Sunday morning, 16 deaths had been blamed on the storm, including from snow removal and traffic accidents and house fires.

The storm's effects stretch from Minnesota east to New England, and south as far as North Carolina. Associated Press photos from Saturday showed homeless men trying to keep warm on an outdoor heating grate in front of the Federal Trade Commission in Washington, DC.

Dozens of metropolitan areas are affected, including New York, Toronto, Boston, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Chicago. Satellite photos taken by NASA show a huge land area turned white by snow. The most serious consequences, however, will result from the bitter cold and wind, which have caused temperatures below 0° Fahrenheit (-18 Celsius) and even more dramatic wind chills.

In Canada, 35,000 residents of Newfoundland were still without electricity on Sunday morning and Newfoundland Power was imposing rolling outages, according to the CBC. A total of 190,000 Newfoundlers—nearly 40 percent of the province's population—lost electricity on Saturday, and wind chills got as low as -30° C (-22° F) on Saturday night.

A vortex of arctic air is expected to bring extreme cold again from Sunday through Wednesday. Low temperatures of -15° F are predicted for Chicago, with afternoon high temperatures for much of the Ohio River Valley and Midwest likely to stay below 0° F on Monday. Parts of Kentucky are expected to see similar cold, and temperatures below freezing will stretch as far south as Atlanta and Alabama.

A chart posted by the Weather Channel shows that -5°

F temperatures with a five-mile-per-hour wind will cause frostbite on exposed skin in 10 minutes. In large parts of the country, wind chills have been or will be low enough to cause frostbite within five minutes.

The state of Minnesota has ordered all schools closed on Monday as a precaution. In Wisconsin, the cities of Madison and Milwaukee have made the same decision.

The cold has led to tragic fires, but also hindered the ability of firefighters to respond. The BBC reported a case in Minneapolis where spray from fire hoses turned to ice before it hit the building. The *Attleboro Sun Chronicle* in Massachusetts ran dramatic photos of whole fire engines encased in ice at the scene of a fire.

In suburban Philadelphia a worker was using a backhoe to move road salt from a 100-foot high storage pile when the salt collapsed on him. An accident involving a pickup truck and a bus in Indiana killed the driver of the truck and injured 15 passengers on the bus, according to the *New York Daily News*. Traffic deaths have been reported in Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio and Connecticut.

The widely reported number of 16 deaths does not appear to include three children who died in a house fire caused by a space heater in New Albany, Indiana, outside of Louisville. The *Louisville Courier-Journal* reported that all three victims were less than 10 years old, and that a fourth child was severely injured.

In Columbus, Ohio, WBNS-10TV reported on a family with nine children who became homeless on Saturday night because of a similar fire. The family's two-year-old child knocked over the heater accidentally.

In Massachusetts, the Red Cross told boston.com that house fires drove 115 people from their homes in the first four days of the year.

Fires caused by space heaters are one of the many consequences of the extreme income inequality in the US and of inadequate social programs. Under the

federal government's LIHEAP program, which offers fuel assistance to families making less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level, a family gets only one payment per year. Even this inadequate relief program was inflicted with budget cuts in 2011.

In the area affected by the storm, hundreds of thousands of workers had their extended unemployment benefits cut off at the end of December. This brutal attack followed the November cut in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to less than \$1.40 per person per meal for the nearly 50 million Americans who rely on that program. Tens of millions of these workers live in the huge area affected by the storm and subsequent cold.

Homeless people are at risk for both frostbite and hypothermia in the cold, and shelters in Boston and New York have been so full that people have had to sleep in hallways. As of November, New York's homeless population was estimated at 64,000 people, including 22,000 children.

In Boston, the number of homeless families as reported in the 2013 United States Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Survey had increased by 14 percent over the past year. In a city where the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is close to \$1,500, 14 percent of homeless adults had jobs but could not afford shelter.



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