

Winter Storm Pax Devastates South; Now Moving Up East Coast **News**

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(weatherchannel.com) - After leaving more than half a million customers without power across the Southeast, Winter Storm Pax is finally moving away from the Deep South.



"The ice storm was as bad as we expected," said weather.com senior meteorologist Jon Erdman. "One inch or more of ice accumulation was reported in at least seven South Carolina counties, as well as Richmond County, Ga."

In North Carolina, snowfall led to a disastrous commute Wednesday afternoon in Raleigh and Charlotte. Cars slid off roads and heavy traffic led to gridlock, forcing some drivers to sit in hours of slow commutes or abandon their cars. Other states dealt with heavy freezing rain that felled trees and power lines, creating a scary scene in a heavily wooded region.

At least 14 deaths have been blamed on the storm: two in North Carolina, one in South Carolina, two in Mississippi, two in Georgia and seven in Texas. More than 3,000 flights were canceled Wednesday in the U.S., and more than 5,000 additional flights were canceled Thursday morning. More than 568,000 homes and businesses were without power in the region Thursday morning.

"Meanwhile, up to 11 inches of snow piled up in parts of east Tennessee, even into parts of northwest Georgia," said Erdman. "Huntsville, Ala. picked up from 4 to 7 inches of snow."



Alabama

North Alabama should begin thawing out after a slippery, icy morning. Authorities asked people to

stay at home early Thursday after a winter storm dumped snow and ice across most of the region Wednesday evening. Forecasters predicted some areas could get 6 inches of snow and even more overnight. Roads were slick across a wide area, and many school systems and government offices closed for a third straight day.

But temperatures are supposed to warm to 40 degrees and higher on Thursday afternoon, and forecasters say sunnier skies should help melt away the frozen precipitation. Temperatures will dip to the freezing mark again late Thursday, but high temperatures are predicted near 60 degrees on Friday.

Many schools in central and northern Alabama, including the city of Huntsville, were closed Thursday.

Georgia

Georgia utility companies report that about 350,000 customers in the state were without power before dawn Thursday. When the freezing rain finally ended in eastern Georgia early Thursday morning, a thick coating of ice was bringing down many trees and power lines. In that region of Georgia alone, more than 124,000 homes and businesses were without power Thursday, with most of those outages being in the Augusta area, according to an AJC.com report.

Emergency responders say at least seven people have been hospitalized in sledding accidents throughout Georgia.

Two deaths in Georgia have been attributed to the storm. An 65-year-old woman was found dead in her unheated trailer in Whitfield County, and a 50-year-old Butts County man died outside of his home, most likely of hypothermia, according to AJC.com.

Nearly all metro Atlanta school districts canceled classes for Thursday. And there's plenty of uncertainty about Friday, as well.

More than 250 car accidents occurred Wednesday on state roads, leading to at least 32 injuries but no deaths, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Airlines have canceled hundreds more flights at Atlanta's airport -- the world's busiest -- as the remnants of a snow and ice storm move across the area. A total of about 775 flights Thursday into and out of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport have been canceled, according to the flight tracking service FlightAware. That represents about 30 percent of the total flights for the day at Atlanta's airport, which is the major hub for Delta Air Lines.

The city of Atlanta is closed Thursday except for essential personnel, as is the state government. "Let's get through Thursday together," Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed added.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal, who was widely criticized over his handling of the last storm, sounded upbeat this time.

"Thanks to the people of Georgia. You have shown your character," he said.

Prior to the storm's arrival, forecasters were comparing the expected impacts to an ice storm that hit the state in 2000. That storm left more than half a million homes and businesses without power and totaled \$35 million in damages.

Mississippi

The Mississippi River bridge on Interstate 20 at Vicksburg, Miss., reopened late Wednesday after a

chain-reaction crash shut it down for hours. Louisiana State Trooper Albert Paxton said the eastbound and westbound lanes of the bridge reopened about 7:30 p.m. The four-lane bridge runs between Vicksburg and Delta, La. An 18-wheeler skidded on ice and crashed into a railing at about 4 a.m. At least four other tractor-trailer rigs followed. Paxton said a tanker was carrying a waste flammable liquid corrosive — N.O.S. acetonitrile, sodium hydroxide — that leaked into the river but it was not immediately clear how much. Crews plugged the leak about 12:30 p.m., he said.

At least two traffic fatalities in north Mississippi on Tuesday were attributed to the storm system. The Mississippi Highway Patrol said David Watson Sr., 67, of Carrollton, died in a one-vehicle accident on Mississippi Highway 35 in Carroll County. Troopers said Watson's car hit an icy patch on the road and overturned several times. Watson was pronounced dead at the scene. Also Tuesday, Tara N. Pugh, 27, of Reform, Ala., died when her Jeep Wrangler apparently skidded after crossing an icy bridge in U.S. Highway 82 in Lowndes County and rolled down an embankment. The Highway Patrol said it has handled almost 300 accidents since Tuesday and dozens more have been reported by city and county law enforcement agencies.

North Carolina

In a scene eerily similar to the one that happened in Atlanta just two weeks ago, Charlotte and Raleigh experienced major traffic delays and slowdowns Wednesday afternoon as residents attempted to leave work and get home before conditions worsened. In both cities, drivers were seen abandoning their cars and walking down interstates.

As snow started to fall around midday, everyone left work at the same time, despite warnings from officials to stay home altogether because the storm would move in quickly. By Wednesday night, abandoned cars littered the roadways in Raleigh, WRAL News reported, but streets were for the most part cleared of the earlier traffic snarl.

"It seemed like every other car was getting stuck, fishtailing, trying to move forward," said Caitlin Palmieri, who drove two blocks from her job at a crafts store in downtown Raleigh before getting stuck. She left her car behind and walked back to work.

Thursday morning, the NCDOT announced they'll be moving cars off state highways in an effort to clear the way for snow plows, so automobiles may not be where drivers abandoned them.

More than 88,000 customers remained without power Thursday morning in North Carolina. Charlotte mayor Patrick Cannon declared a state of emergency for the city Wednesday.

Police said a woman died in a weather-related accident in Moore County when a car she was riding in hit a tree. A state Highway Patrol trooper was hospitalized after his parked cruiser was struck by another car.

More than 10 inches of snow fell from the storm in some areas, and incredible snowfall rates of 2 to 3 inches per hour were still being reported Thursday morning across parts of the Piedmont.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for Wednesday and into Thursday covering 95 of the state's 100 counties. Local governments and schools around Raleigh will be closed Thursday. UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. Central University and N.C. State University called off classes. All flights out of Raleigh Durham International Airport are canceled through Thursday morning. The Charlotte Observer says about 100 National Guard members were sent to the Queen City as backup.

South Carolina

At least 224,000 customers were still without power Thursday morning after Winter Storm Pax left as much as an inch of ice coated on the state's trees and power lines.

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<http://www.kttn.com/kgozfm/modules/news/article.php?storyid=111438>

Governor Nikki Haley has declared a State of Emergency to mobilize additional state resources should they be needed in response to hazardous weather. In response to a request by the Governor, President Barack Obama declared an emergency in the State of South Carolina and ordered federal aid to supplement state and local response efforts to Winter Storm Pax.

A woman was killed Wednesday when her car slid into a parked S.C. Department of Natural Resources truck on ice-slick I-95 Wednesday morning in Clarendon County, The State reports.

Hundreds of thousands of power outages were reported across the state by Wednesday night. The heaviest power outages Wednesday were in the Aiken area and in Berkeley and Dorchester counties northwest of Charleston. A Marion county sheriff deputy reports the cities of Marion and Mullins are totally dark.

Mike Quinn, a spokesman for the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, said that about over a hundred thousand customers of the state's 20 electric cooperatives were in the dark as ice-coated tree limbs and power lines snapped. He said the problem would likely get worst with winds expected to pick up to 20 MPH overnight Wednesday.

Transportation Department workers were working 12-hour shifts to apply salt and other de-icing materials. The agency also moved a number of crews from the Lowcountry to the Upstate to deal with heavy snow.

Speaking from the state's emergency operations headquarters in West Columbia, Governor Nikki Haley told South Carolinians to "hunker down and stay home."

The governor's office dispatched additional Highway Patrol officers to help with the expected accidents and stranded motorists on state highways. State workers and volunteers from the Red Cross and Salvation Army are prepared to open shelters if needed.

Tennessee

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam declared a state of emergency Wednesday in anticipation of Winter Storm Pax as forecasters had predicted that some areas could get as much as 12 inches of snow.

The winter storm warning covers a number of southern counties along the border with Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi and extends into all of eastern Tennessee into southwest Virginia, meteorologist Eric Holweg said.

It's expected to snow up to one inch per hour overnight in some places, he said.

Both the Nashville and Memphis airports cancelled some flights Wednesday and are experiencing some delays. The National Weather Service says that hazardous travel conditions will persist Thursday even after precipitation ends.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation had already reported that ice and snow is affecting 79 state roads, TEMA spokesman Jeremy Heidt said.

Additionally, State Route 165 in Monroe County and State Route 171 in Sevier County have been declared extremely hazardous, he said.

Almost all the roads in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park were closed as well as all facilities inside the park, officials said Wednesday.

"The worst is going to be in the Smokeys and dropping off as you head further west from there," he said of the snowfall. That area, he said, is expected to get 10 to 12 inches of snow.