

Beat: News

Powerful winter storm dumps snow, brings Arctic cold to northeastern U.S.

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USPA News - A powerful winter blast of freezing temperatures and whiteout conditions crippled much of the Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States on Friday, prompting closures and the cancellation of thousands of flights. At least nine deaths were blamed on the storm.

The National Weather Service (NWS) said the system, which dumped a foot (30 centimeters) of snow on Chicago on New Year's Day, moved East, unleashing nearly 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow in areas near Boston and more than 6 inches (15.2 centimeters) in New York City. The snowfall had cancelled more than 2,000 flights across the affected region by Friday afternoon, according to FlightAware.com, which tracks commercial flight activity across the United States. Approximately 2,600 U.S. flights were cancelled on Thursday as a result of the winter storm, according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). At Chicago's Midway airport, where temperatures plummeted to a bone chilling 5 degrees Fahrenheit (-15 degrees Celsius), Southwest Airlines said the effects of the storm forced them to proactively cancel all operations until Friday afternoon. Hundreds of stranded passengers had already spent the night on the tarmac, sleeping in planes. "The storm system is causing widespread delays and cancellations," a Southwest statement read, adding that it was working with authorities to recover from the impact of the winter storm. All New York City airports were temporarily closed on Friday morning but later reopened, although hundreds of cancellations were reported throughout the day. In New York City, newly sworn-in Mayor Bill de Blasio urged residents to stay indoors and out of expected dangerously cold temperatures. All public schools and some businesses in the city remained closed. "This has been and remains a dangerous storm. It is going to be bitter cold today, and New Yorkers need to be extremely careful going outdoors," he said. De Blasio added: "The best things people can do are to stay off the roads so we can clear them as fast as possible, and to check in on elderly and vulnerable neighbors who might need help this morning." He also urged residents who did need to go somewhere to use mass transportation. The winter storm, which has unofficially been dubbed 'Hercules,' had been blamed for at least nine deaths by Friday afternoon. The National Weather service said some of the coldest air of the year should arrive by the weekend over the northern tier of the country. Heavy wind gusts could bring wind chills to more than minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-28.8 degrees Celsius), making frostbite a real concern. "The polar vortex is expected to drop from Central Canada bringing dangerously cold temperatures to the Northern Plains/Upper Midwest by Saturday," the NWS wrote. "The combination of the modified arctic air with the gusty winds will lower wind chill temperatures to the single digits over the Mid-Atlantic while areas of New England can expect readings into the -10s and -20s." The weather service warned people in the affected areas to dress appropriately to avoid hypothermia and cover all exposed skin.

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