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## Roaring Blizzard Shoves Northeast Into Winter's Grasp

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**A** month across the abyss of winter, the season's first major storm buried New York and much of the Northeast this weekend, stifling travel, slowing the pace of life for millions and recasting the landscapes of 12 states.

The storm, which the National Weather Service classified as a blizzard, roared in from the Midwest and turned into a classic northeaster, with 30 to 50 mile per hour winds and nebular arms revolving counterclockwise. It moved up the East Coast, gathering ocean moisture and hurling it back at the land as snow that blanketed cities and towns, closed airports, canceled hundreds of flights, choked railways and highways and filled the air with crystalline impressions.

It began quietly in the New York metropolitan area before noon, a gentle whispering fall in the pale January light. But by evening, it had become a driving force of windblown snow, with gusts that hissed against the windows and mounting accumulations that, meteorologists said, only hinted at the depths to come.

By 7:00 a.m. today it had snowed 13 inches in Central Park and up to 19 inches in parts of Northern New Jersey, Eastern Long Island, Southern Connecticut and shore areas of Rhode Island.

Cape Cod and southeastern Massachusetts were expected to be hit hardest, with more than two feet of snow blown by winds that gusted up to 60 miles an hour. At 9 this morning winds were measured at 74 miles per hour in Nantucket.

"The snow is falling not in inches but in feet," said Gov. Mitt Romney, who warned that the threat would be complicated by a full moon and a tidal surge in coastal communities.

Jeff Warner, a meteorologist with Pennsylvania State University, said that the storm could rival the one in February 1978, which left over two feet of snow.

"Across eastern New England, this will be one of the biggest," he said.

The Northeast was hardly alone in wintry misery. Heavy snows pounded parts of the Midwest, with the Chicago area getting its biggest snowfall of the season: more than eight inches by yesterday afternoon with more to come. At O'Hare International Airport, flight delays averaged seven and a half hours and hundreds of stranded passengers slept on cots near baggage claim areas.

In Connecticut, Gov. M. Jodi Rell ordered a state emergency operations center to open yesterday as forecasters predicted coastal flooding in parts of New London and Middlesex Counties.

And in New York City, officials declared a snow emergency as of 7 p.m. on Saturday night, prohibiting motorists from standing or parking at major arteries. The city also suspended alternate side parking rules for Monday and Tuesday.

Blizzard warnings were posted for most of New York. The mid-Hudson Valley expected up to 20 inches of snow, and up to a foot was forecast for Albany, the Mohawk Valley and parts of western New York.

Three weather-related deaths were reported in Ohio, where a man fell through ice on a pond and two people suffered heart attacks shoveling snow.

In Wisconsin, the Milwaukee suburb of West Allis had 12 inches of snow and up to 5 inches more was expected overnight. Southern Michigan had 6 to 14 inches of snow yesterday, and drifts of three feet were common.

In the pantheon of winter storms in New York, it did not compare with the all-time record blizzard of Dec. 26-27, 1947, which interred the city in 26.4 inches of snow, and it is also expected to fall short of the blizzard of Jan. 7-8, 1996, which left 20.2 inches in Central Park.

The snow has tapered off in the city, though Mr. Warner said the rest of the day would still be windy and very cold. He said that drifts could pile up to several feet.

The National Weather Service's criteria for a blizzard are winds of at least 35 m.p.h., falling or blowing snow and visibility of less than a quarter-mile for three consecutive hours. But even before the service officially designated the storm a blizzard, you could hardly tell neighbors shoveling huge drifts from their driveway that it was not a blizzard.

And it was cold, bitter cold. It was 29 below zero in Massena, N.Y., 28 below at Saranac Lake, N.Y., 14 below in Syracuse and 10 below in Albany. In New York City it was a relatively balmy 10 above Saturday morning.

That was frigid enough to keep the customary tourist hordes away from Times Square, which looked more like a ghost town in the swirling snow, and it was obvious that restaurants, theaters and other attractions had a terrible day.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the three major metropolitan airports -- Kennedy International, La Guardia and Newark Liberty International -- as well as bridges, tunnels and the Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) rail system, went into a full mobilization of personnel and equipment and was bracing for a rough weekend.

All three airports remained open, but today 60 flights have been canceled at Kennedy, 300 have been canceled at Newark, and 250 at La Guardia.

Logan International Airport in Boston was closed this morning at 5:30 a.m., Long Island MacArthur Airport at 8:15 a.m. and T.F.Green airport in Rhode Island at 8:30 a.m.

Traffic was moving on the George Washington Bridge and the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, but there were 35 mile-an-hour speed limits on Staten Island bridges.

With whiteout conditions on runways, the intensifying storm closed the Philadelphia airport at 3:30 p.m. and Bradley International Airport near Hartford at 6:30 p.m. AIRPORT ADD HERE

Acting Gov. Richard Codey of New Jersey announced that a state of emergency would be in effect from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. today, allowing the police to close roads, if necessary, to ensure public safety.

Up and down the Northeast Corridor, driving was treacherous on icy, snow-blown highways, roads and neighborhood streets. There were countless minor accidents, though no deaths or serious injuries were reported, and motorists were advised to stay home or use public transportation. But trains and buses were also delayed by the storm, and getting around, for those who had to, was an ordeal. Many residents heeded the warnings to stay home and many businesses closed for the weekend.

The Long Island Rail Road, which operates 450 trains on 11 branches on a typical weekend, reported only two train cancellations, both on the Greenport line, and only minor delays on the rest of the system.

"But that could change as the storm worsens and the wind increases," said Brian P. Dolan, a spokesman. "They're predicting drifts of snow. If we get two to three inches an hour, that challenges us to keep pace with the storm."

In the meantime, he said, special trains were spraying antifreeze on power rails and activating electric and gas-powered heaters to keep switches moving.

Even before the snow began falling, the Metro-North Railroad had a signal problem on its upper Hudson line between Croton and Poughkeepsie that delayed about eight trains for up to 30 minutes. Today, Metro-North trains will run locally every two hours.

New Jersey Transit, which operates 11 rail lines, 3 light rail systems and 240 bus routes around the state

and into Manhattan, reduced its service schedule on Saturday afternoon until midnight tonight.

As of 8 a.m. today, New Jersey Transit restored most of its South Jersey bus service. Its North Jersey bus service was expected to be restored by 10:00 a.m. Dan Stessel, a spokesman for New Jersey Transit, said that express trains on the Northeast Corridor line had been canceled, although local trains continued to run.

The Midtown Direct line between Penn Station and Dover, N.J., in Morris County was rerouted to Hoboken, where passengers could switch to PATH trains running to 33rd Street in Manhattan.

Forewarned, cities and counties across the region had readied armies of equipment and sent out fleets of salt spreaders and snowplows to counterattack as the snow began falling.

In New Jersey, state transportation officials and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority had more than 2,000 trucks on the roads to plow and spread salt. The Port Authority also had hundreds of pieces of equipment out, and more than 200,000 gallons of liquid de-icing chemicals for use on wings and other surfaces.

In New York City, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg went to the department's Queens repair shop and said 2,500 sanitation workers -- using 1,450 garbage trucks with plows, 82 dump trucks with plows and 350 salt spreaders -- would work around the clock in two shifts to keep major arteries and streets open. He said he expected that all of the city's 6,300 miles of streets would be plowed at least once by the start of the workweek tomorrow morning.

Mr. Bloomberg also issued a few words of caution.

"The streets even after they are plowed will be slippery, so you should take caution," he said. "The streets will be narrower, the snow has to go some place."

He also urged residents to dress warmly, check on neighbors, take mass transit to work and keep cars off the streets so the plows can get through.

Several firefighters were injured battling a fire in the Bronx, though it was still unclear whether the fire was related to the weather.

Many schools with Saturday classes closed. Aqueduct and the Meadowlands Racetrack canceled their Saturday racing programs, and many college basketball games were postponed. National Football League conference championship games in Philadelphia (Eagles-Atlanta Falcons) and Pittsburgh (Steelers-New England Patriots) were still on track for today and, with the snow over by game times, only bitter cold and high winds were expected to be factors.

The storm's timing significantly diminished its impact. For millions of suburban commuters and students home for the weekend, the snow was not a great hardship, except for the ordeal of shoveling a driveway

or sidewalk, which leads every winter to many heart attacks.

But for many residents of the metropolitan area, the storm provided an opportunity -- one of the few in a relatively mild winter that has recorded a total of only 4.3 inches of snow since autumn -- to get out with sleds, skis or snowshoes and to frolic in the drifts. And for those so inclined, it was a chance to relax indoors, snowed in with Bach, Brubeck or a good book, cozy behind panes embroidered with frost. For those who ventured out to play - hooded, booted, muffled to the eyes - the storm offered glimpses of nature's beauty: empty streets turned into white meadows, black-and-white woodlands painted in moonlight, snowflakes glittering like confections in a bakery - frosted, glazed, powdered, sugary - and in the parks children, romping, padded like armadillos. There had been warnings for days by meteorologists and television broadcasters, and most people had stocked up on supplies for a weekend siege. But there were many last-minute shoppers yesterday, even as the snow began falling. Doreen and Neal Erps, of North Brunswick, N.J., wheeled a cart out of a Home Depot on Route 1 in Edison with cabinet shelves. "I figure we'll be in the house all weekend long," said Mr. Erps. "We might as well do something productive, and remodeling the bathroom beats shoveling snow." But he had a shovel and a snowbrush in his cart as well. He explained, "I have several of them at home already, but with a storm like this you can never have enough shovels." Nearby, Howard Myers, of New Brunswick, N.J., was loading up his S.U.V. with groceries and firewood. "My next stop is the liquor store," he said. "I'm going to get a nice bottle of Scotch, put the logs on the fire and let the storm rage outside while I read my book." At a Home Depot on 23rd Street in Manhattan, shovels, salt buckets, windshield scrapers and other storm equipment flew off the shelves. By 12:30 p.m., only four of the 40 snow blowers delivered on Friday - some fetching \$729 - were left, and the shovels were gone.

"Where are the shovels?" asked an anxious customer, one of a cluster.

"They are unloading them right now," an employee said.

"C'mon, let's go," another patron said as the group hurried downstairs to meet the delivery truck. At a Blockbuster Video in Old Tappan, N.J., 80 customers waited at noon in a 45-minute line that snaked down the aisles, past "Anger Management" and "Intolerable Cruelty," all the way back to "Mystic River." Alone at the check-out was the store manager, Brian (company policy prohibited him from giving his last name). In his three years with Blockbuster, he said, he had never seen a line so long.