

Winter storm surprises East Coast

U.S. EAST COAST (AP) — Thousands shivered Wednesday in stranded cars, waited at airports or dug themselves out from nearly 2 feet of snow as forecasters admitted that the deadly East Coast storm was a nasty surprise.

"We're really cursing those computer models," said Andrew Woodcock, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sterling, Va. "They had the low (pressure system) way out to sea."

The storm, however, raced north along the coast Monday and Tuesday, dumping nearly 2 feet of snow along the coast. Flurries were expected Wednesday across parts of the Northeast as the storm system moves out to sea, and more delays were expected at major Eastern airports, some of which were shut down Tuesday.

Many schools and businesses across the East also were closed Wednesday, along with all Philadelphia city offices and courts and most Maryland state offices. And more than 150,000 people were still without power in the Southeast on Wednesday.

Traffic deaths on snowy and icy roads were reported from the Carolinas to New York, and two people were found dead of exposure in South Carolina.

In Great Barrington, Mass., the search resumed today for a 5-year-old girl missing and feared dead after she and her 9-year-old brother tumbled into the icy Housatonic River while walking to school Tuesday. The boy was treated and released.

Hundreds of motorists waited for help Wednesday along Interstate 85 in North Carolina,

which was virtually shut down by jackknifed trucks for a 20-mile stretch near the Virginia state line.

National Guardsmen and Highway Patrol officers were sent to help.

Some of the stranded motorists had been in their cars since Tuesday afternoon, they complained in cellular phone calls to broadcasters in the area.

"I've been here since 2:30, and I don't understand why no one's come," one irate motorist, who identified herself only as Cheryl from San Diego, complained Wednesday.

Elsewhere in North Carolina, 120 travelers were stranded overnight at Raleigh-Durham International Airport, where airlines were not expected to begin carrying passengers again until this morning, airport spokesman Mike Blanton said. The airport had a record 20.3 inches of snow.

Crews were trying to open one 10,000-foot runway so airlines could bring in empty planes to prepare for the resumption of operations today, Blanton said.

By Wednesday, up to 22 inches of snow had fallen in North Carolina, with 20 inches in Maryland, 19 in Virginia, 15 near Washington and in north-central Massachusetts and 14 in southern New Jersey. Farther south, Georgia was reeling from a weekend ice storm that caused an estimated \$35 million in damage.

"We were definitely hoodwinked in this case," said Paul G. Knight, a meteorologist with the Independent Penn State Weather Communications

"We're really cursing those computer models. They had the low (pressure system) way out to sea."

Andrew Woodcock
meteorologist, National Weather Service

Group in University Park, Pa.

"Wow. Eating a lot of humble pie this morning," Dewey Walston wrote Tuesday to fellow weather service forecasters in Washington, where 250,000 federal employees were given another day off Wednesday.

States of emergency were declared in parts of Georgia, North Carolina and Maryland, with the National Guard called in to help clear roads and rescue motorists.

Nearly 127,000 people remained without electricity today in North Carolina, where the town of Pinehurst had no water service because of power outages, and more cold weather was forecast. More than 40,000 were still blacked out in South Carolina.

In Georgia, where 17,000 people were without power Wednesday, state officials feared sleet this weekend could snap even more power lines.

Hatch drops out of race, endorses Bush

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Orrin Hatch dropped out of the presidential race Wednesday and endorsed George W. Bush, a man he once quipped would be a good president only after spending eight years as Hatch's No. 2.

He said his admiration for Bush had grown during their months on the campaign trail.

"I believe Governor Bush is the one who can unite the party and bring the White House back to us," Hatch said as he announced his own withdrawal. He made the announcement at the Capitol, his wife Elaine by his side.

"Now that I am out, I think Governor Bush is the only person who can get things done, cut marginal tax rates so that we can keep this economy going and improve our schools. I think he can reach across partisan lines," Hatch said.

Bush, campaigning in New Hampshire, said Hatch's endorsement

"Most every Republican (voter) was taken by the time I got in. I had to rely on people who had never really been active in the political process before."

Sen. Orrin Hatch

former Republican presidential candidate

was "especially significant because he has debated, worked and campaigned with all of us. ... I am honored to have his support."

Hatch abandoned the race after a last-place finish in Monday's Iowa caucuses, where he received 1 percent of the Republican vote. Rival John McCain didn't run in Iowa and still received 5 percent.

Looking relaxed and sounding upbeat, Hatch told several jokes at his own expense. He recounted how a woman in New Hampshire asked to

have her picture taken with him. When he asked if she wanted to send the photo to her children, she replied, "No, I'm just trying to finish off the roll."

Hatch postponed the news conference a day because of a snowstorm. He said he had wondered aloud if the storm was a sign from God to stay in the race, and his wife had said, "No, the Iowa caucuses were the sign from God."

Hatch, 65, said he may have waited too long to start his long-shot candidacy. He got into the race last sum-

mer, months or years after other candidates.

"Most every Republican (voter) was taken by the time I got in. I had to rely on people who had never really been active in the political process before," he said.

Hatch raised and spent about \$2.5 million for his campaign, rejecting an additional \$1 million in possible federal matching funds. He had hoped to raise \$36 million.

Hatch plans to return to Utah on Friday and is expected to announce his intention to seek a fifth term in the Senate this fall.

His likely Democratic challenger, state Attorney General Jan Graham, said Wednesday she doubted Hatch's failed presidential bid would hurt him at home.

"I think, if anything, people have felt a little sorry for Senator Hatch, and it has engendered a sympathetic response for him," she said.

Chechens stall Russian progress in capital

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — Rebels armed with grenade-launchers and sniper rifles attacked Russian troops from all sides in the Chechen capital Wednesday, fighting to keep the federal forces from advancing on a strategic square.

In spite of their lack of progress, Russian military commanders continued to give an upbeat assessment of the month-old push to take Grozny.

The approximately 3,000 rebels remaining in Grozny "have nowhere to go, and their backs are against the wall," said Gen. Valery Manilov.

Despite heavy snow and fog, Russian warplanes bombed the city, and Russian troops pressed their eight-day struggle to penetrate the city center.

Manilov told a news conference in Moscow that federal aircraft and artillery were targeting only about 30 percent of the buildings in Grozny — including administrative buildings and high-rises — because civilians were believed to be taking shelter in the rest.

"We are trying to minimize the losses among peaceful civilians in the

course of the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya," he said.

Manilov said civilian deaths in Chechnya were in the hundreds rather than the thousands as claimed by the Chechens, who say the Russians are bombing and shelling indiscriminately.

Fierce fighting engulfed bomb-shattered districts of eastern Grozny, which the Russians had previously claimed to control.

The Russians appeared to have made no progress toward seizing a key objective, Minutka Square, from the rebels. The square, near a Russian-held bridge across the Sunzha River that bisects the city, could give Russian forces substantial leverage for moving into downtown Grozny.

Russia's ORT television channel reported that snipers were firing heavily from high-rises along the streets leading to the square.

In the other major center of rebel resistance, the rugged southern mountains, Russian forces waged heavy air and artillery strikes Wednesday against suspected rebel bases in the Argun and Vedeno gorges.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ Arizona

Study: Freshmen alcohol consumption at 34-year low

TUCSON, Ariz. (U-WIRE) — Freshmen may be less drunk than ever before — at least according to new research.

Alcohol consumption has decreased among freshmen college students, according to a study by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California Los Angeles. This year, the annual study shows the lowest level of freshmen beer drinking in the 34-year history of the survey.

The number of freshmen who drank beer frequently or occasionally was down to 50 percent in 1999, compared to 75 percent in 1981. Liquor and wine rates were 67 percent in 1987, when the question was first asked, and have now fallen to 54 percent.

■ Miami

Cuban boy, grandmothers meet at neutral location

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Elian Gonzalez and his grandmothers arrived Wednesday at a neutral site for a reunion that was arranged by the U.S. government because of the personal and political passions swirling around the 6-year-old Cuban boy.

Elian was driven to a nun's house in Miami Beach to see his grandmothers, who had flown in from Washington and were then brought to the home in a helicopter.

The grandmothers came to the United States last week to appeal directly to the American people and Congress to send the boy back to his father in Cuba. Elian's relatives in Miami want him to stay and are fighting a U.S. government order sending him back.

The grandmothers were to see Elian privately, with the boy's Florida relatives nearby in the house.

■ Washington

Study: Small-town youth more likely to use drugs

WASHINGTON (AP) — Adolescents in small-town and rural America are much more likely than their peers in urban centers to have used drugs, according to a private study released Wednesday.

Eighth-graders in rural America are 104 percent more likely than those in big cities to use amphetamines, including methamphetamines, and 50 percent likelier to use cocaine according to the study released by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

■ Arkansas

Co-pilot of jet that crashed says he wanted to abort landing

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — The co-pilot of an American Airlines jet that crashed while trying to land in a storm last June said Wednesday that he knew the plane was off course and had urged the captain to abort the landing.

Instead, the captain attempted to straighten the plane as it was buffeted by high winds. The plane touched down off-center, breaking apart and killing 11 people, First Officer Michael Origel testified during a National Transportation Safety Board hearing.

Capt. Richard Buschmann was among those killed June 1, when the McDonnell-Douglas MD-82 jet, traveling from Dallas to Little Rock, crashed.

The NTSB is holding a three-day hearing to try to determine what roles the weather and the pilots' decisions played in the crash.

WEATHER

TODAY

Scattered snow, showers,
high 28, low 16

TOMORROW

Mostly Cloudy,
high 32, low 22

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