

Huge swath of U.S. endures bitter cold to start 2018

A huge swath of the United States is starting 2018 with brutal cold and dangerous wind chills, as low temperatures are forecast to linger across much of the East Coast, Midwest and South in the coming days.

Temperatures are forecast to be 20 to 30 degrees below average east of the Rockies and west of the Appalachians through Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service.

The NWS issued wind chill advisories covering a vast area from South Texas all the way to Canada and from Montana and Wyoming in the west through New England to the northern tip of Maine.

The frigid weather included record-setting low temperatures in South Dakota, according to the NWS. The mercury plunged to minus 21 in Pierre, minus 30 at Mobridge and minus 32 in Aberdeen. Aberdeen's previous record-low temperature for New Year's Day had stood for 99 years.

A hard freeze is forecast for parts of the southern U.S. as temperatures are expected to drop to the 20s and teens. A hard freeze warning was under effect for parts of the South that is home to about 17 million residents.

Despite the subzero temperatures, New Year's Day festivities in many U.S. cities enduring the brutal cold went on as normal.



Lloyd Seawright of Shorewood, who will be taking an icy dip for the ninth consecutive year, takes a selfie with a group dressed as polar bears, including (from left) Dave Kirkpatrick, his twin brother Dan Kirkpatrick, both of Greenfield, and Suzanne Forge of New Berlin, before Milwaukee's annual Polar Bear Plunge. Mike De Sisti, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

In Milwaukee, where the high was forecast to reach only 4 degrees on Monday, the traditional Polar Plunge into Lake Michigan happened as scheduled.

Monday was one of the four coldest New Year's days on record in Milwaukee. The coldest high temperature was 2 degrees recorded in 1969, followed by a tie for second place between 1924 and 1974 at 3 degrees.

Before Monday's event, Milwaukee Polar Plunge organizers warned participants that doctors suggested that they think twice about diving into icy Lake Michigan.

"Due to the extreme cold conditions expected on January 1st, 2018 it is recommended by medical professionals that you do not participate in this event," organizers warned. "If you choose to participate, you are doing so at your own risk."

The Penguin Plunge in Narragansett, R.I., on New Year's Day was also still on. But officials advised would-be plungers, expected in the thousands, to "use their

good judgment” when weighing go or no-go.

And in Philadelphia, Mummers Parade participants strutted their stuff for the beloved event despite concerns for the young and elderly — and even worries over brass horns freezing up.

The heads of the five Mummers divisions — string bands, fancy brigades, wench brigades, comics and fancies — voted 3-2 to play on as planned, according to the *Philly Voice*.

Dangerously low temperatures enveloped eight Midwest states including parts of Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and Nebraska along with nearly all of Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota.

The weather service said a temperature of 15 below zero was recorded in Omaha before midnight Sunday, breaking a record low dating back to 1884, and the temperature was still dropping early New Year’s Day. That reading did not include the wind chill effect — which could hit negative 40 degrees, according to forecasters.

Omaha officials cited the forecast last week in postponing the 18th annual New Year’s Eve Fireworks Spectacular that draws around 30,000 people.

It was even colder in Des Moines early Monday at 20 below zero and wind chill dipping to 31 below zero. Des Moines city officials had closed a downtown outdoor ice skating plaza and said it won’t reopen until the city emerges from sub-zero temperatures.

In Minnesota, morning temperatures across the state ranged from -13 in the Twin Cities to -27 in Pipestone. Windchills were around -30 in the metro and down to -40 in Duluth, Rochester, Marshall and Bemidji.

In Western North Carolina, the weather caught residents and visitors by surprise, snarling traffic and canceling holiday events. The area around Asheville, N.C. saw light rain on Sunday, but it was so cold that the roads quickly became icy and dangerous.

Traffic on Interstates 26 and 40 came to a standstill for several hours Sunday after wrecks and heavy holiday traffic made it harder to treat the slick spots.

Contributing: Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Asheville Citizen Times, and the Associated Press

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