

Israel on high alert as winter storm approaches



A stormy day in Jerusalem (illustrative photo credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Israel on Thursday prepared to weather an approaching storm with police, rescue services, and local authorities dusting off their emergency equipment and advising residents to take extra precautions against the high winds, hail, rain and thunder expected to lash the country over the coming two days.

The stormy weather was expected to begin on Thursday evening with heavy rain and hail. By Friday the wind in some areas was predicted to reach 90 kilometers per hour (55 mph) along with thunderstorms. Flooding was expected in low-lying coastal areas and in wadis leading to the Dead Sea. By Saturday afternoon the storm was expected to ease off and Sunday was to bring warmer, calmer weather.

During the night, temperatures in Jerusalem were expected to drop to 7° C (44° F), in Tel Aviv to 12° C (54° F), in Ashdod in the south to 12° C, and in Haifa to 10° C (50° F.)

That's significantly milder than some of the extreme weather being experienced in the US and some meteorologists said that reactions were exaggerated.

Nevertheless, authorities were taking no chances.

In Tel Aviv, sand berms were built up along the beach as a precaution against predicted six meter (20 foot) waves washing on streets near the coast. The municipality has taken similar steps in recent years after a severe storm in 2010 brought waves that caused flooding.



People cross Jaffa Street, central Jerusalem, on a foggy winter day, January 2, 2018. (Miriam Alster/FLASH90)

Police said they were deploying extra units in particular on main arteries and at key junctions to assist in keeping traffic flowing. They planned to provide constant updates to media and navigation apps on traffic conditions.

Police warned they expect that many roads will become blocked, based on previous experience. The force warned drivers to avoid flooded roads, to maintain a safe difference from other vehicles and to reduce speed. Drivers were advised to check their vehicles to make sure the tires are correctly filled with air, that wipers work correctly, and that headlight lenses were clear.

The Jerusalem municipality issued a statement instructing residents to secure loose objects that might be blown off roofs and to check that home heating systems were operating correctly and are properly ventilated. The municipality also published a Hebrew-language instruction video, based on the meme “Winter is coming” from the hit television show “Game of Thrones.”

In Tiberias, the annual marathon, which was scheduled for Friday, was delayed until Sunday, Hadashot news reported. The Israeli Nature and Parks Authority also planned to close some hiking routes.

The Education Ministry announced that it had canceled all school trips for Friday.

Magen David Adom, Israel's largest ambulance service, said in a statement it had prepared the four-wheel drive ambulances and jeeps it has in its fleet.

The airports authority said it was preparing for possible changes in timetables and that all flights to Eilat had been diverted to Ben Gurion International Airport.

Fire and Rescue services announced they had made preparations for the approaching storm including rubber dinghies, pumps, saws, generators, and other emergency equipment.



Illustrative photo of a Magen David Adom ambulance in heavy rain. (Magen David Adom)

Snow began falling at the Mount Hermon ski site Thursday morning where temperatures have plummeted to freezing. Managers purchased some 70 tons of salt to keep approach roads open. The site, which already has some 25 centimeters of snow, was opened for visitors earlier this week.

Israel Railways cut back trees and branches that might fall on to lines and heating elements were prepared to prevent rails being damaged by the cold. Extra checks

were also made on lines, the railways said. In Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh, the railway prepared salt to clear snow and heating units were put on platforms for the benefit of passengers.

The wild weather comes after what has been a relatively dry winter with limited rainfall. Last week Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel organized a mass prayer for rain at the Western Wall in Jerusalem that was attended by thousands of people. There was some rain on Sunday, which Ariel said at the time showed that sometimes prayer helps.

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