

Deadly snow storms cause chaos across Spain



Heavy snowfall left at least four people dead across the country, trapped motorists, and shut down Madrid

Madrid, January 9 (RHC)-- Snow storms across much of Spain left four people dead and caused chaos across much of the country, trapping motorists and closing the capital's air and rail links, with more snowfall to come.

The bodies of a man and woman were recovered by the southern Andalusia region emergency service after their car was washed away by a flooded river near the town of Fuengirola. The Interior Ministry said a 54-year-old man was also found dead in Madrid under a huge pile of snow. And a homeless man died of hypothermia in the northern city of Zaragoza, the local police department reported.

On Friday, Madrid experienced its heaviest snowfalls since 1971 after what the AEMET weather agency described as "exceptional and most likely historic" conditions caused by Storm Filomena. It warned that another 20cm (nearly 8 inches) snowfall was expected on Saturday in Madrid and central Spain's lower

plains, with up to 50cm (20 inches) at higher altitudes.

“Even if, despite the extremely difficult weather conditions, the number of incidents is relatively limited, we have three deaths to mourn,” Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska told a news conference.

Apart from Madrid, the exceptional conditions put four other regions in the centre of the country on red alert on Saturday: Aragon, Valencia, Castilla La Mancha and Catalonia.

On Twitter, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called on people to stay indoors and follow the instructions of the emergency services. He paid tribute to the work of the rescue agencies who had helped hundreds of people trapped in the snow overnight.

Madrid’s Barajas airport was shut down late on Friday, transport officials said the snowfall disrupted traffic on nearly 400 roads, and the Renfe rail network said all trains to and from Madrid had been cancelled.

Madrid’s emergencies agency said they had worked all night to help trapped motorists, freeing about 1,000 vehicles. They asked others still stuck to be patient.

Mayor of Madrid, Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida, described the situation as “extremely serious” in a tweet on Saturday. “We are working to clear access to hospitals as quickly as possible,” he told the La Sexta television channel on Saturday. “But frankly, that is complicated. It has been snowing so much.” The army had been called in on Friday to help the authorities, he added.

Forecasters said the heavy snow would continue until Sunday, before Storm Filomena begins moving northeast, although temperatures would remain exceptionally low.

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