

Arctic blast brings frigid temperatures to northern U.S. and Canada



Commuters brave cold temperatures as they arrive on a ferry on Tuesday in Portland, Maine as a mass of arctic air swept into the US northeast, bringing bone-chilling sub-zero temperatures [Robert F Bukaty/AP Photo]

New York, January 11 (RHC)-- Bitter arctic air blasting across the northern United States and Canada has led to winter-chill alerts from the US states of Montana to Maine, and up to the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

The frigid air mass, ushered in behind a cold front sweeping over the East Coast into the Atlantic, was expected to bring a combination of icy temperatures and winds that make it feel as cold as minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 40 Celsius) in some places, the US National Weather Service (NSW) said on Tuesday.

Schools in Massachusetts's three largest cities – Boston, Worcester and Springfield – cancelled classes on Tuesday in response to the winter weather, saying they did not want children standing outside for extended periods of time waiting for buses.

Wind-chill warnings and advisories were posted in 12 northern US states on Monday, from the northeastern corner of Montana to northern Maine. Environment Canada also has warned of extreme cold across much of Quebec, New Brunswick and other regions. In Toronto, Canada's largest city, daytime temperatures have been hovering near minus 20 Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit).

"When I first came to Canada, it was so weird to see a 24hr weather channel," Umut Oguzoglu, an economics professor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg said on Twitter of the freezing temperatures. "Now I know why that's necessary."

"At least the humidity is low," joked Emilio Alarcon, a professor at the University of Ottawa in Canada's capital, where temperatures hit minus 26 Celsius (minus 15F).

The freezing temperatures in the U.S. were caused by a pocket of cold air descending from Canada, but the good news is that it is expected to be a short-lived cold spell, said Bill Simpson, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Norton, Massachusetts, office.

"We're getting an arctic cold front with northwest flow, quickly switching to a southwest flow," he told the Associated Press news agency, adding that temperatures are expected to rise to about 40 Fahrenheit (4.5 Celsius) in the Boston area later in the week.

Wind chill temperatures in areas near lakes Erie and Ontario in New York state were expected to drop as low as minus 30 Fahrenheit (minus 34 Celsius) by the afternoon. To make matters worse, parts of the state were expected to be hit with up to two feet (0.6 metres) of lake-effect snow and winds gusting up to 64 kilometres per hour (40mph).

Meanwhile, some U.S. states and cities have put measures in place to respond to the low temperatures. Rhode Island opened warming centres across the state for people who need temporary shelter from the cold, and in Boston, Mayor Michelle Wu reminded residents the city's network of public libraries are open for people looking for a place to warm up.

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