

*Winter storm kills dozens in U.S.,  
thousands of homes without  
power*

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**A restaurant is covered in ice from the spray of Lake Erie waves during a winter storm that hit the Buffalo region in Hamburg, New York [Kevin Hoak via Reuters]**

Washington, December 25 (RHC)-- A frigid storm has killed at least 24 people across the United States and is expected to claim more lives after trapping some residents inside houses and cars and knocking out power to several hundred thousand homes and businesses.

About 60 percent of the U.S. population faced some sort of winter weather advisory or warning, and temperatures plummeted drastically below normal from east of the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, the National Weather Service said on Sunday.

Some 1,346 domestic and international flights were cancelled as of early Sunday, according to the tracking site FlightAware. The scope of the storm has been nearly unprecedented, stretching from the Great Lakes near Canada to the Rio Grande along the border with Mexico.

The deadly blizzard unleashed its full fury on Buffalo, New York, on Christmas Day, trapping people in their cars, causing power outages and forcing the closure of the airport until Monday. The National Weather Service said the snow total at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport stood at 43 inches (109 centimetres) on Sunday morning.

Officials said the death toll from the storm had risen from three to seven overnight in the Buffalo region. "This will go down in history as Buffalo's most devastating storm. This one is for the ages and we're still in the middle of it," New York Governor Kathy Hochul said.

Daylight on Sunday revealed cars nearly covered by 6 ft (1.8 metres) snowdrifts and thousands of houses, some adorned in unlit holiday displays, dark from a lack of power.

With snow swirling down untouched and impassable streets, forecasters warned that an additional one to two feet of snow was possible in some areas through early Monday morning amid wind gusts of 64.37 kilometres per hour (40 miles per hour). "This is not the Christmas any of us hoped for nor expected, but try to have as merry a Christmas as possible today," Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz tweeted.

The storm knocked out power in communities from Maine to Seattle in the US. But heat and lights were steadily being restored across the country. According to PowerOutage.us, less than 300,000 customers were without power on Sunday morning – down from a peak of 1.7 million. Officials said rolling blackouts would continue for the next few days.

Meanwhile, more than 50 people were hospitalised in western Canada after a passenger bus crashed on a highway, authorities said. The cause of the Saturday evening accident, which occurred on a highway some 330 km (200 miles) east of Vancouver in an area of British Columbia hit by days of bad winter weather, has yet to be provided.

Regional health authority Interior Health tweeted that 53 patients were being treated at three hospitals but said it could not yet give details on patient conditions. A portion of the highway impacted by the crash was closed until Sunday morning, provincial transportation authorities tweeted. The accident occurred as brutal weather batters wide swathes of North America, snarling transport and causing numerous deadly accidents during one of the busiest travel periods of the year.

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