

Winter chill brings power outages and travel problems to U.S. south



Cars drive down a snow-covered roadway in Dallas, Texas, as the state braces for more icy weather in the coming days [Shelby Tauber/Reuters]

Dallas, February 1 (RHC)-- Another bout of winter storms has brought icy conditions to large areas of the southern United States, causing transportation issues and leaving thousands of people without power.

More than 1,600 flights have been cancelled, and authorities have reported an uptick in auto collisions due to poor driving conditions as an ice storm spreads inclement weather from western Texas to the state

of West Virginia on Tuesday.

Two deaths have been attributed to the storm so far, both as the result of car accidents. The police department in Arlington, Texas, reported one of the deaths in a vehicle “rollover” overnight, and the fire department in Austin, Texas, said a death occurred there during a 10-car pile-up on a highway ramp.

“Since midnight, we’ve responded to 90+ accidents, including 3 w/our own units! There were also 2 fires this AM, both caused by space heaters,” the Austin fire department tweeted. “Please, STAY HOME AND OFF THE ROADS, give space heaters plenty of space, never use your oven to stay warm, and keep generators outside.”

The ice storm is the latest round of extreme weather to test infrastructure and public authorities in the US, raising questions about government preparedness for difficult conditions that are expected to become more routine as a result of climate change.

In late December, a “bomb cyclone” lashed the country with harsh blizzards and freezing temperatures that resulted in power outages for hundreds of thousands of households and killed more than a dozen people.

In mid-January, tornadoes and heavy rain also killed seven people in the southern states of Georgia and Alabama.

In a press conference on Tuesday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said that the state was expecting “subfreezing temperatures” in the west, central and northern parts of the state throughout the week. Heavy rainfall was also expected, Abbott said, with the potential for flash floods in central, east and southeast Texas on Wednesday and Thursday.

“Because of icing, many roads in Texas will remain very dangerous for the next 24 to 48 hours,” Abbott said. He noted that 1,600 roads were currently affected by the weather and that the state’s transportation agency had deployed about 1.3 million gallons [4.9 million litres] of brine and other materials to make roadways more drivable.

Abbott stated that the Texas power grid, which has been criticised in the past for failing during periods of extreme cold, was “functioning just fine.” As of Tuesday morning, he said that about 7,000 power outages had occurred in the state but that they were “actively being addressed by local utilities.”

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