

Arctic blast kills over a dozen across southern U.S.

BY ANNIE GOWEN, ANDREW FREEDMAN, TIM CRAIG AND FENIT NIRAPPIL

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — An Arctic blast continued to wreak havoc across a large swath of the United States on Tuesday after a snowstorm left more than a dozen dead and millions without power, with officials in some places saying residents might be in the dark for days.

And it's not over. A second storm had begun taking shape Tuesday night, aimed at the nation's southern tier and some of the same hard-hit areas, according to The Washington Post.

Among those killed were a 10-year-old boy who fell through ice near Millington, Tennessee, and a woman and a girl who died of carbon monoxide poisoning in Houston after a car was left running in a garage to keep them warm, according to police. A tornado associated with

the storm system also struck North Carolina, killing at least three and injuring 10.

Wind-chill watches and warnings stretched from the Dakotas to the Gulf Coast as the coldest of this Arctic outbreak hit Tuesday morning, with Dallas, Houston, and Oklahoma City posting their lowest temperatures since at least 1989.

With nearly three-quarters of the contiguous United States blanketed by snow, at midday Tuesday, there were 3.8 million still without power in Texas, and thousands more in 16 states, including Oregon, Kentucky, Louisiana and West Virginia, according to the website PowerOutage.us.

Texas was hit especially hard. In Corpus Christi, a coastal community in the southern part of the state, preparations are typically underway to host an influx of students for spring break at this time of year. But on Tues-

day morning, the temperature had plunged to 19 degrees, causing pipes to burst and straining the city's ability to care for its residents.

"This cold has been extremely difficult on us because we are a coastal community of 300-plus days of warm weather a year," said Mayor Paulette Guajardo, who has been on the job for a month. "We are just completely unaccustomed to it — we are a bathing-suit-and-shorts community, but we are going to get through it, and we are going to be stronger because of it."

Like the rest of Texas, Corpus Christi has been hit by sustained power outages, with Guajardo estimating that at least a third of her city's 325,000 residents have lost power. She and numerous officials around the state said the Electric Reliability Council of Texas "failed" Texans by not doing enough to prepare for the cold snap.

Fairgrounds

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Hinds said the fairgrounds has been working with the county to get appropriate fund transfers to cover the cost of operating these kinds of services.

But even those events, such as the Cascade Chute Outa rodeo, still did not make the fair and expo center as much money as they would in a normal year, given capacity restrictions and more time and resources it takes to make an event safe, Hinds said.

"Any return was better than none," he said.

Hinds and the fair board are now trying to plan for multiple scenarios as the county heads into another year rocked by the pandemic. The plan is to create multiple budgets for the county fair, ranging from forecasting revenue from a typical fair, to not having any kind of fair at all, he said.

"The No. 1 goal is to do this safely and responsibly," he said.

Hinds said he is cautiously optimistic about having some kind of fair this year, even if it doesn't look like fairs in

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past years. And this year, Deschutes County has the benefit of being able to learn from the lessons already learned from running safe events in the COVID-19 era.

"We're not going into it as blind as we were last year," he said.

While not preferable, Hinds said even if a fair does not happen again this year, the situation will be "livable." "We lived through it this year, and we'll still be in existence. We'll still be able to pay the bills," he said. "But it certainly doesn't happen without challenges, and those will continue to compound into the future the longer we are forced to do things and make cuts."

As of last week, every weekend in 2021 except one was booked at the expo center, which is just one section of the whole fairgrounds property, according to a presentation made to the Deschutes County Commission

on Thursday. Some are more traditional events, like a Taco & Margarita festival in September and a BBQ&Brew Festival in April, as well as continued vaccination clinics.

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While the fairgrounds can accommodate multiple events at the same time, Hinds said that if there is ever a conflict between a different event and the county's vaccination clinics, COVID-19 response efforts will always take priority.

"We think working with medical professionals that we've come up with strategies in the short and midterm to allow what's on the calendars to continue," he said.

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Bond

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"It's not ideal. You don't want kids in a closet," said Principal Joan Warburg. "Who wants learning in the hall? I don't." School administrators say these capacity issues could be fixed if voters approve Sisters School District's \$33 million bond on May 18.

"If we don't (pass the bond), I'm not sure how we fit in more kids," Warburg said.

The bond would replace Sisters Elementary School — the school district's oldest building — with a larger, K-5 school right next to Sisters high and middle schools.

Sisters school leaders tout increased capacity, the convenience of being next to the district's existing schools and an outdated building as the main reasons for a new school.

School officials say a new building is simply needed for a city where new families keep arriving. Sisters' population grew by nearly 35% between 2010 and 2018, from 2,038 people to 2,747, according to the U.S. Census Bureau estimates. It's a growth rate comparable to Bend.

"The area's growing quickly, and we want to make sure we're ready for kids," said Superintendent Curt Scholl.

And for locals who need convincing, the bond won't raise property taxes, said Scholl. It will maintain the tax rate that's been in place since residents passed a bond in 2001 to build Sisters High School, he said.

A new, larger Sisters Elementary would bring fifth graders back to the school. The current setup is vexing for staff. When Warburg orders elementary curriculum, it always comes as a K-5 package — which means she has to oversee what teachers are doing in an entirely separate building, she said.

Furthermore, gifted fourth graders who might benefit from sitting in for some fifth-grade lessons don't get to do so in the current setup, Warburg said.

"We can't transport kids across town just to do that," she said.

Capacity aside, Sisters Elementary also dates back to the 1970s. Warburg quipped that it took a year and half to replace lightbulbs in her office and some hallways, since the ballasts that held the bulbs were so outdated that nobody made them anymore.

Even small upgrades in previous bonds, from replacing carpeting to adding classrooms, can't fix everything, she said.



Dean Guernsey/Bulletin file

In December 2020, students at Sisters Elementary School walk apart, guided by pictures of horseshoes on the floor.

"It's starting to show its age, regardless of how much we repair it," she said.

Because the new school would be built next to Sisters high and middle schools, on the city's western edge, life would be easier for school district staffers like the Latino family liaison or school psychologist, who work with students at all three schools, said Warburg.

It could also make commutes easier for parents like Haley Ellis, who has students at both Sisters Elementary and Sisters Middle schools. The schools are on opposite sides of the city, and traffic going east

to west, or vice versa, can be rough due to Sisters only having a couple main thorough-

fares, she said.

"It would definitely make my life simpler to have (the schools) all consolidated," said Ellis, who's also a member of a political action committee to pass the bond.

The school board decided to put the bond on the May ballot, rather than November, due to timing, Scholl said. If passed in May, the district can get a head start on building the school in time for 2023-24 school year, he said.

"With November, I'm not sure we'd be able to make that timeline," Scholl said.

The school district hopes to pay for other various repairs and upgrades in the district if the bond passes, said Scholl. But because the price of building the new school is still un-

known due to fluctuating construction costs, he won't know how much money will be left over. So he didn't want to guarantee additional projects yet, he said.

Mylee Card — a kindergarten teacher at Sisters Elementary and mother of two young children — said a new elementary is needed.

"We are very much over crowded here at SES — and our population doesn't seem to be decreasing," Card wrote in an email. "I also have a daughter that will be a kindergarten student next year, and I'm very excited for her to have the possibility of the new school and all the positive things that would bring!"

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Permits

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"These (new units) won't immediately alleviate the housing shortage," said Damon Runberg, Oregon Employment Department regional economist. "However, they will help move us in the right direction."

Runberg added that 2021 could see a restart in greater "geographic mobility" as the pandemic subsides and people are more likely to sell their homes with less worry about being in contact with others. "More churn within the existing housing market combined with new construction means we are looking at less of a supply shortage," said Runberg.

The demand for housing continues to put pressure on lumber markets.

The average indexed price for pine was \$856 in December compared to \$499 in the same month a year ago. The price of lumber doubled during the pandemic as homebuilders picked up supplies and homeowners worked on projects at home during the periodic quarantines and lockdowns.

Bruce Daucavage, general manager for Prineville-based Ochoco Lumber, said there are other factors in play beyond the demand for lumber.

"Mills are not able to increase hours of work due to the lack of workers. Not the lack of logs. All of my friends who run mills say they cannot get people to work," said Daucavage.

That lack of workers is lowering production, and in some

cases, closing sawmills.

"It is difficult to ramp up production in the West," said Daucavage. "The industry rarely builds large inventories and practices just-in-time production methods. There have been zero mills built in the past few years in the West. Small investments are also a concern."

The building spree hasn't eased home prices. The median price for a single-family home in Bend hit a record high in January at \$580,000, up from \$524,000 in December, according to data from the Beacon Report, which compiles prices for Central Oregon. Prices in Redmond have likewise continued to soar, with the median price for a home at \$377,000 in January, up from \$375,000 in December.

One reason for the continued surge in prices is low inventory, said David Gilmore, broker for Coldwell Banker Bain.

Inventory in Bend is just two weeks, which means if no new homes come on the market, every available home would be sold in two weeks. Historically, Bend has had six months of inventory. The median number of days on the market in both Bend and Redmond was four last month. One year ago it was 115 days on the market in Bend and 119 days in Redmond.

Gilmore said in his 11 years of working in Bend's real estate market, he has never seen such low inventory.

"This market is challenging," said Gilmore. "What I am telling buyers what they need

now is patience, flexibility, and a willingness to pay over list price because the perfect house may not come up, and if it does, there could be a feeding frenzy on it."

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DEATH NOTICES

Donald "Don" L. Hickman
of Redmond, OR
September 12, 1949 -
February 2, 2021

Arrangements:
Niswonger-Reynolds Funeral Home is honored to serve the family. 541-382-2471 Please visit the online registry for the family at www.niswonger-reynolds.com
Services:
A celebration of Don's life will be held at a later date for family and friends. *Contributions may be made to:*
In lieu of flowers please consider donating to: Education Foundation for Bend-La Pine School (Fund: Activity Fee Scholarships) P.O. Box 1436, Bend, OR 97709 www.engageminds.org

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