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Interstates closed; counties under states of emergency



Jeff Dildine, The Times

Traffic on East Bound Interstate 80/94 near Kennedy comes to a stand still as two vehicles spun out and collided with the concrete barrier wall in Hammond early Sunday morning.

January 05, 2014 11:30 pm • [Times Staff](#)

Dozens of stranded people were saved from region interstates as a winter storm slammed Northwest Indiana on Sunday.

The brutal storm system caused officials to shut down Interstate 65 and Interstate 80/94 after Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties issued state of emergency orders.

As winter storm warning was ending late Sunday, area residents were bracing for brutal cold temperatures expected to arrive overnight and linger in the area until Tuesday.



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Indiana State Police shut down all lanes of Interstate 65 from mile marker 260 in Merrillville to mile marker 172 in Lafayette. Troopers also shut down Interstate 80/94 from the Indiana/Illinois state line to U.S. 421 in LaPorte County.

"It is not possible to estimate when the interstate will be reopened, as it will be weather and condition dependent," a state police news release said. They said updates would be available Monday morning.

Members of the Indiana National Guard were dispatched to Gary and Valparaiso to assist local agencies in rescuing stranded motorists and helping emergency medical services personnel, according to a news release from Indiana State Police.

The Illiana Search and Rescue Teams assisted Lake County deputies Sunday in 40 calls of stranded motorists in south unincorporated Lake County, said Patti Van Til, spokeswoman for the Lake County Sheriff's Department.

The Lake County Sheriff's Department issued a state of emergency order Sunday for roads in unincorporated areas of the county. Deputies asked residents to stay off all roads because of blizzard conditions.

Porter County officials issued a state of emergency order, which closed all county roads at 6 p.m. Sunday, said Sgt. Larry LaFlower, a spokesman for the Porter County Sheriff's Department.

The Porter County Sheriff's Department and the Lake County Sheriff's Department said Sunday night that they did not know when the roads would reopen.

The state of emergency orders were issued after plows began having trouble keeping up with drifting snow. The conditions also were causing a delay in reaching dozens of stranded motorists.

Drifting snow was especially bad on east/west roads in Porter County, LaFlower said. By late Sunday, several motorists had become stranded on U.S. 131 in Union Township, he said.

"It's a mess out there," he said. "It's not getting any better."

Emergency personnel were determining on a case-by-case basis whether to take stranded motorists home or to warming shelters, he said.

"That would be dependent on how far we have to get them," LaFlower said.

No serious crashes had been reported to Porter County deputies as of 6:45 p.m., he said.

Van Til said Lake County deputies were responding to multiple crashes but none involved any serious injuries. The county was using warming shelters at the Crown Point Civic Center and the Calumet Township Multipurpose Center.

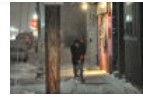
Many towns and cities throughout Northwest Indiana opened warming shelters Sunday for residents.

Shelters in Crown Point and Calumet Township did not have any stranded residents using the shelters.

In Hobart, firefighters from Hobart and Crown Point rescued a man who was working on a cellphone tower about 80 feet above the ground, Hobart police said. Firefighters were able to get him down from the tower, but details about the man's condition weren't available Sunday night.

Officials in Michigan City declared a state of emergency Sunday as a blizzard warning was issued for LaPorte County. The warning was expected to last until Monday.

The South Shore Line canceled all rail service between South Bend and Chicago on Monday, according to a Sunday night news release from Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District.



The unrelenting wintry grip on the region is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

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"NICTD will work to restore service as soon as conditions permit," the release said.

U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky canceled town forums originally slated for Monday.

"The safety and well-being of the residents of the First Congressional District take precedence and everyone should take the necessary steps to remain safe," Visclosky said in a statement late Sunday.

The Indiana Toll Road Concessions Co. issued a winter weather ban Sunday for triple, long double, high-profile oversize permit loads and low-profile steel haulers.

According to the Indiana Department of Transportation, Jasper County and Newton County also shut down their roads Sunday.

Schools, government offices close

As snow continued to pile up on roads and streets in the region, school districts and government offices announced they were closing Monday.

In Northwest Indiana, Portage Township Schools, Valparaiso Community Schools, Crown Point Community School Corp., School Town of Munster, Duneland School Corp., Hobart Public Schools, Hanover Community Schools, Union Township School Corp., Michigan City Area Schools, Tri-Township Consolidated School Corp., Andean High School, Griffith Public Schools, Bishop Noll Institute, Marquette Catholic High School and North Newton School Corp. canceled Monday classes.

In the south suburbs, Monday closings had been announced for West Harvey and Dixmoor District 147, Harvey District 152, Calumet City District 155, Hoover-Schrum District 157, Brookwood District 167, Sauk Village District 168, Sandridge District 172, Crete-Monee District 201 and St. Ann School in Lansing.

Valparaiso University announced it would suspend operations, including classes, until noon Tuesday. Residence halls and the Harre Union will remain open with dining services as students return to campus.

Indiana University Northwest, Purdue University Calumet and Purdue University North Central will be closed Monday.

Gary officials said all city buildings except the Hudson and Campbell Fitness Center and the Genesis Convention Center will be closed Monday. Officials also canceled trash pickup and recycling for Monday and said they will implement the holiday schedule for trash pickup.

Munster and Cedar Lake officials also canceled trash pickup services for Monday. Highland delayed a Town Council study session, closed the town offices and canceled a 12th Night Celebration set for Monday on the Main Square.

Porter County government offices will be closed Monday due to the weather.

The city of Portage announced late Saturday that Tuesday's City Council meeting would be postponed until Jan. 14. Also, garbage and recycling pickup Monday will be postponed.

All library branches of the Lake County Public Library will be closed Monday.

Michigan City also closed its city offices and delayed garbage pickup by a day.

Dangerous wind chills

Temperatures were expected to plummet below zero Sunday night into Monday morning. According to the National Weather Service, the coldest temperatures were expected to arrive in the area about 9 a.m. Monday, when wind chills are expected to reach 50 degrees below zero.

The wind chills are expected to stay around 40 degrees below zero for the rest of Monday, according to the National Weather Service. By Tuesday morning, wind chills are expected to reach

30 degrees below zero.

A record high of 8 degrees below zero is predicted for Monday, according to the National Weather Service. The high is expected to be 17 degrees below zero. By Tuesday, temperatures are expected to increase to 1 degree for the low and 19 degrees for the high.

The National Weather Service warns that frostbite and hypothermia can happen within minutes.

Parts of the region had snow accumulations of 8 inches to 16 inches Sunday, according to the National Weather Service. Snow was expected to continue falling in some parts of the region until Sunday night, which meant an additional 1 inch to 3 inches of snow.

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