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20 inches: Snow hampers rescue workers; more snow coming

By JOE ORSO / La Crosse Tribune

A weekend storm dropped as much as 29.5 inches of snow on the Coulee Region during the weekend.

In La Crosse, 20 inches fell between 6 p.m. Friday and 6 p.m. Sunday, according to the National Weather Service office in La Crosse, with the heaviest amounts coming during the nights. Winona County received some of the heaviest snowfall, with 29.5 inches falling by 8 a.m. Sunday.

Both blizzard and winter storm warnings ended at 6 p.m. Sunday, but the service reported another 1 to 2 inches could fall overnight.

Another system will be coming to the upper Midwest during the middle to later part of the week, the weather service reported.

The snow caused difficulties for drivers across the region.

Three people were injured Saturday when a vehicle went out of control on Hwy. 61 and hit the back of a plow truck near KOA campground in Winona County, according to the Minnesota State Patrol.

Jennifer Jack, 27, of Winona was at Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in critical condition.

The patrol reported 469 accidents statewide on Saturday, none of which were fatal.

Between 7 a.m. Friday and 3 p.m. Sunday, 43 accidents were reported in La Crosse County, seven with injuries, according to a report from Nancy Heimke, telecommunicator supervisor for La Crosse County.

Police departments around the area reported slide-offs and disabled vehicles.

The snow caused difficulties for area rescuers as well.

On Saturday, two first-responders in Centerville, Wis., were walking to a residence on Harris Road when a snow plow hit a parked car which hit the first-responders, said Matt Zavadsky, director of Tri-State Ambulance, which was also responding to the call.



Ed Noelke, owner of Carl B. Noelke Company at 529 Main Street in downtown La Crosse, clears the sidewalk in front of his business Sunday afternoon as the snow fell in La Crosse for the third day in a row. PETER THOMSON photo

Zavadsky said the two suffered minor injuries, but did not need to be transported to the hospital by ambulance.

On Sunday morning, a Tri-State crew had to walk a half mile to a home on South 21st Street in La Crosse due to an impassable road, and then carry a person with a minor medical condition the half mile back with the help of the fire department.

Tri-State had responded to 44 calls by 4 p.m. Sunday, about twice as many as usual on a weekend. Zavadsky said none were serious medical calls.

On Sherman Ridge Road in Allamakee, Greg Rosendahl was driving a wrecker from Danny Mac's Towing when his truck got stuck in the snow on the middle of the road. He had been on his way to help a woman whose car had slid into a ditch Saturday night.

Using cables and chains, Rosendahl freed his truck in about an hour, and made it home by midnight.

"That was it for the night," he said. "The county didn't want us out there unless it was an emergency."

He said the county sent a snowplow and law enforcement official to help the woman.

White-out conditions persisted Sunday morning, Rosendahl said.

About 35 people had finished 12 plow routes in the city of La Crosse by about 5 or 6 p.m. Sunday, said Dale Hexom, La Crosse director of public works. He said with the heavy and wet snow, plows weren't able to fully clear all driving lanes, like the two outside lanes on Losey Boulevard.

"With all of that snow piling up on the boulevards and alongside the driving and curb lanes, it doesn't push far enough," Hexom said. "It shouldn't really cause problems for tomorrow morning's commute, but some of the streets may feel narrow because of the height of the snow."

After an evening rest and depending on weather conditions, Hexom said, crews would be heading back out Sunday night and into Monday morning to widen lanes and clear intersections.

All outgoing American Eagle flights from La Crosse Municipal Airport were cancelled. Two incoming flights were cancelled, and the status of an 8:05 p.m. flight from Chicago was pending.

Some morning flights of Northwest Airlines were cancelled, and afternoon flights left and arrived with delays.

Many churches around the area cancelled Sunday services due to the snow.

The Rev. Diane Kay Martin cancelled the 10 a.m. service at Trinity United Church of Christ, located southeast of La Crosse off Hwy. 14-61, after going on WKBT's website and seeing a note that said too many churches had cancelled for them to list.

"I thought, 'OK, I'm not the only one,'" Martin said. "I didn't want to be a groundbreaker in that."

Martin sent out e-mails, made phone calls and changed the church's answering machine to relay the cancellation, and e-mailed her sermon, "Redeeming Judas," to congregants.

"More than one said, 'Well, it's probably a good thing you're cancelling because you would have been alone over there,'" Martin said.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church on West Avenue held services, but the pews weren't filled.

While about 140 usually attend the 9 a.m. service, about 25 made it Sunday, said the Rev. Kris Fahey, pastor at St. Paul's. At the 11:15 a.m. service, six instead of the usual 20 to 30, worshiped.

"The people that were here were so enthusiastic about being here that it added a lot," Fahey said.

Fahey had caught a ride to church with the organist, since her alley on the south side of La Crosse had not been plowed.

"Even if one person comes," she said, "if we have the organist and pastor, then it'll be OK."

Bangor schools reported they'd be starting two hours late.

In other news, the La Crosse Fire Department responded to a residential fire at 4043 Hwy. B at 5:03 a.m. Sunday, according to a report by Division Chief Michael Ethridge. Smoke from the basement was caused by a blocked chimney, and the fire had spread to the interior walls when the firefighters arrived, according to the report.

Most of the fire damage was contained to the kitchen walls, with some smoke damage on the second floor of the single-family residence.

No one at the home was injured. A firefighter sustained an injury but remained on duty.

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