

Record low temperatures kill at least nine people in US

By Trévon Austin
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The new year in the United States was accompanied by record low temperatures that killed at least nine people, but the real death count could be much higher. The National Weather Service (NWS) issued wind chill advisories and freeze warnings across the country as temperatures dropped as low as -29 degrees Fahrenheit in some areas.

Authorities in St. Louis, Missouri, said a 54-year-old homeless man was found dead inside a trash bin, frozen to death as the temperature dropped to -6 Fahrenheit. In Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, a 27-year-old woman was found dead on the shore of Lake Winnebago, probably dead from exposure to the frigid air.

In Detroit, where temperatures reached -2 Fahrenheit, an unidentified man was found dead outside a church, according to NBC affiliate WDIV. In Milwaukee, the county medical examiner's office said the bodies of two men found on Sunday showed signs of hypothermia.

After the mercury fell as low as -27 Fahrenheit in Bismarck, North Dakota, a man was found dead alongside a riverbed. In Charleston, West Virginia, a homeless man was found frozen to death on a porch. A man was found outside "extremely cold" in Madison, Wisconsin, and died on his way to the hospital.

According to the *Guardian*, hospitals in Atlanta saw a surge in emergency room visits for hypothermia and other cold-related ailments from temperatures as low as 13 Fahrenheit.

"We have a group of patients who are coming in off the street who are looking to escape the cold—we have dozens and dozens of those every day," Dr. Brooks Moore, associate medical director in the emergency department of Grady Health System, told the Associated Press.

Warming shelters were even opened across the South

as freeze warnings covered the region, including hard freeze warnings for much of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Temperatures fell to 8 Fahrenheit near Cullman, Alabama, and 20 Fahrenheit in Mobile, Alabama. Georgia saw one of its coldest temperatures of the winter, 2 Fahrenheit, at a US Forest Service weather station at Toccoa.

Indianapolis tied a record low temperature of -12 Fahrenheit for January 2, 1887, causing public schools to shut down. The Indiana city of Lafayette saw temperatures fall to -19 Fahrenheit, breaking the prior record set in 1979.

In other parts of the nation, near-record lows were recorded. When the ball dropped in New York City on New Year's Eve, the temperature was 9 Fahrenheit, marking the second coldest day on record after December 31, 1917, according to NBC New York meteorologist Raphael Miranda. The high for Des Moines was -1 Fahrenheit, which is the second-coldest high on New Year's Day since -6 degrees in 1885, the National Weather Service said. Chicago-area wind chills are expected to lie between -35 and -20 Fahrenheit.

Along with the record cold temperatures, multiple house fires broke out across the Midwest.

In Indianola, Nebraska, three people died in an early morning house fire. Indianola Fire Chief Tom Davidson said the cold temperatures made it difficult to combat the fire. Four people lived in the home, but only one was able to escape. In Waterloo, Iowa, 63-year-old Robert Smiley died from smoke inhalation after a house fire sparked in his home overnight.

In Minnesota, residential fires left seven dead over the weekend. In Hibbing, a fire left two grandparents and two of their grandchildren dead. The grandfather, a retired firefighter, saved one of his grandchildren, but

died while trying to rescue others. According to the *Star Tribune*, Minnesota has seen 64 fire-related deaths this year, logging the highest number of such deaths since 2002.

The wave of frigid temperatures has exposed the disastrous state of social conditions in the United States, affecting the most vulnerable: the homeless, impoverished elderly and youth.

A study published by the *Journal of Adolescent Health* reported that 1 in 10 people aged between 18 and 25 have experienced some form of homelessness in the past year. Furthermore, 1 in 30 adolescents aged between 13 and 17 experienced homelessness unaccompanied by an adult. This suggests that some 3.5 million young adults and 660,000 adolescents had been homeless for some period within the previous year.

Researchers polled more than 26,000 young people and their families over the past two years. The report intended to challenge the notion that homelessness afflicts mostly older men. The authors of the study wrote that “point in time” surveys underestimate how homelessness affects youth because “young people often shift among temporary circumstances such as living on the streets and couch surfing in unstable locations.”

The study found that homelessness was no less widespread in rural areas than urban ones, and young individuals with an income below \$24,000 had a 162 percent higher risk of experiencing homelessness.

Young people without a high school diploma or GED were found to be 346 percent more likely to be homeless, LGBT youth were 120 percent more likely, African Americans had an 83 percent greater risk, non-white Hispanics had a 33 percent higher risk, and unmarried parenting young people are 200 percent more likely to be homeless.

“Our findings probably challenge the images of homelessness. Homelessness is young,” Matthew Morton, a research fellow with the policy center, told the *Washington Post*. “It’s more common than people expect and it’s largely hidden.”

He continued, “Many young people are getting hammered in this economy...and far too many youth have experienced trauma and lack stable family situations. You have a major affordable housing crisis.”

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