

Ice storm cripples north-east US

Contributed by Egypt News
Sunday, 14 December 2008

As many as 1m people have been left without power in the north-eastern US after one of the worst ice storms in a decade crippled the electricity grid

States of emergency have been declared in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and in parts of Maine and New York state.

Officials say the damage is extensive and it could take several days before all power is restored. Temperatures are forecast to remain below freezing.

At least four people are so far thought to have died as a result of the storm.

The body of a public works supervisor was recovered from a reservoir in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on Saturday, a day after he responded to a call about tree branches downed by the storm.

Meanwhile, a man in Danville, New Hampshire, died of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by the generator he was using to heat his camper van. A couple also died in Glenville, New York, when a generator filled their house with the gas.

A severe ice storm in December last year was blamed for the deaths of at least 22 people in the central US.

About 1.4 million homes and businesses across the four affected states were left without electricity on Friday morning after a widespread overnight ice storm coated power lines, pylons and trees.

Ice weighs down power lines in New Hampshire (13 December 2008)

By Saturday evening, up to 1m remained without power, including more than 300,000 in New Hampshire, the worst affected state.

New Hampshire Governor John Lynch on Saturday warned those affected that they should not expect power to be restored for several days.

"If you don't have power, assume that you will not get it restored today, and right now make arrangements to stay someplace warm tonight," he said.

The state's largest utility company, Public Service of New Hampshire, said the damage was "extensive" and that an accurate assessment was a challenge due to the many impassable roads.

"What is facing us is the apparent need to rebuild the entire infrastructure of some sections of the electrical delivery system," Martin Murray, a PSNH spokesman, told the Associated Press.

Mr Lynch and his counterpart in Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, have declared full states of emergency and called up members of the National Guard to help.

New Hampshire has also requested a federal emergency declaration. The government has already sent generators, cots and other supplies, state officials have said.

In New York, Governor David Paterson has declared a state of emergency in 16 counties. All but five roads managed by state highway officials were cleared on Saturday, although trees are still collapsing because of ice on their branches.

The governor of Maine, where more than 170,000 were without power on Saturday, has meanwhile declared a limited state of emergency, enabling utility crews to work longer hours.

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