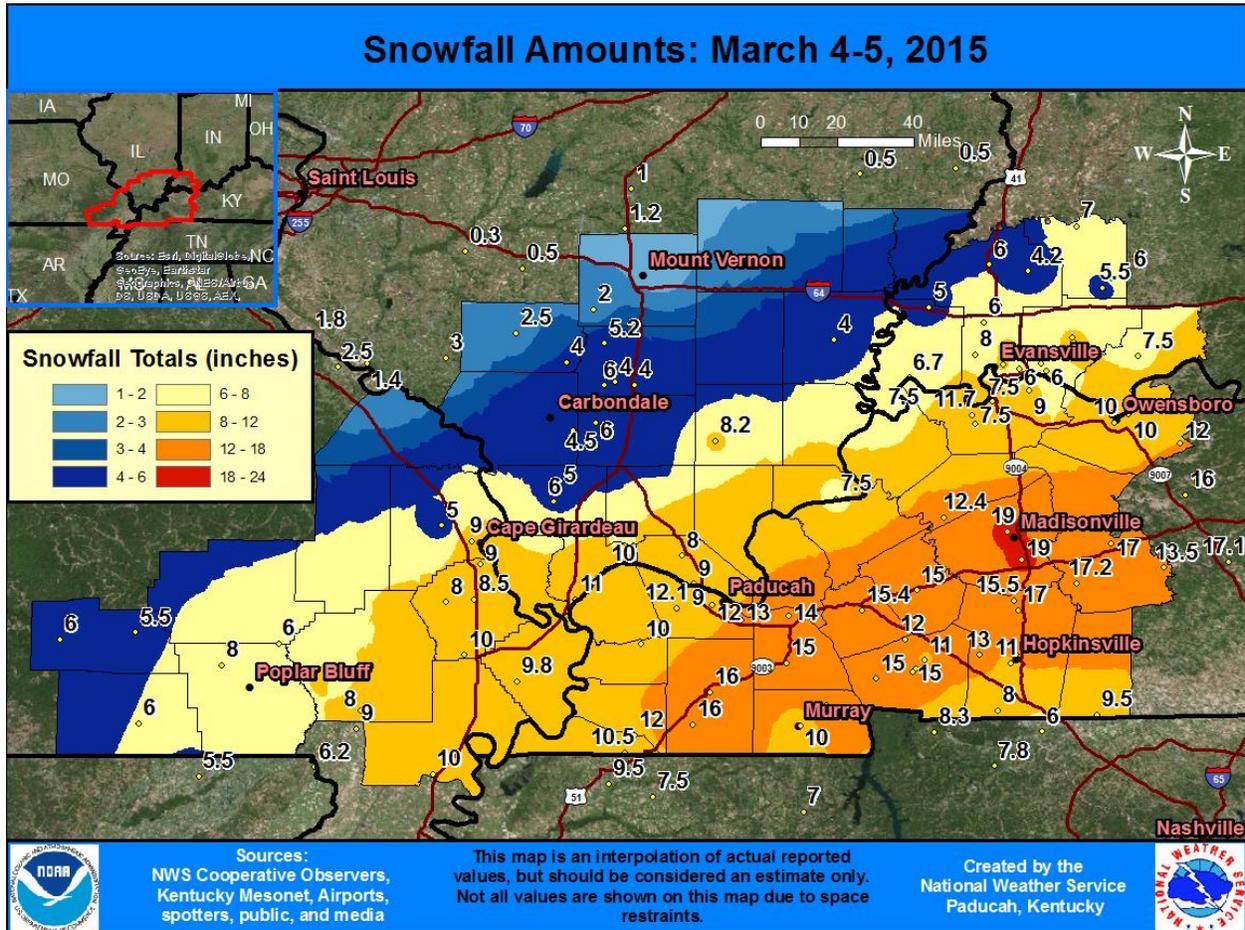


A major winter storm dumped 6 to 18 inches of snow across our region. The Kentucky governor declared a state of emergency for the second time in less than a month.



Snowfall amounts were lowest in the Mount Vernon, Illinois area, where only an inch or two was reported. The highest amounts were from 15 to 19 inches in a swath of western Kentucky extending from Mayfield east across the Land-Between-The-Lakes area, then east through the Western Kentucky Parkway corridor to Central City.

PRECIP TYPE: Rain gradually changed over to snow during the afternoon and early evening. A few hours of sleet and freezing rain occurred during the transition from rain to snow. Up to an inch of sleet accumulated, followed by snow. During the transition to sleet and freezing rain, some thunder and lightning was observed in southeast Missouri.

SNOWFALL RATES: The snow fell heavily during the night, accumulating at the rate of two inches per hour and reducing visibility below one-half mile. The highest specific snowfall reports were about 18 inches in Muhlenberg, southern Hopkins, and northern Christian Counties in western Kentucky.

WINDS AND DRIFTING: North winds gusted up to 25 mph, causing some drifting of the snow. Drifts were locally up to two feet deep.

TRAVEL IMPACTS: Travel became very difficult. In much of western Kentucky, unplowed roads were impassable to smaller, lighter vehicles. Interstate 24 was closed through most of western Kentucky due to numerous crashes and stranded vehicles blocking traffic. The closure extended from exit 11 in the Paducah area to the Cadiz exit in Trigg County. Two companies of the Kentucky National Guard were deployed to assist hundreds of individuals stranded in their vehicles on Interstate 24, some of them for almost 24 hours. Hundreds of semis were stranded, along with numerous other vehicles. The interstate was blocked or closed for most of the 24-hour period following the snowstorm. The most persistent blockages and closures were in Lyon, Caldwell, and northern Trigg Counties. In Hopkins County, a double-trailer semi crashed on southbound Interstate 69, blocking both lanes for several hours. A portion of the Western Kentucky Parkway was also closed due to a semi that was stuck in snow. Across western Kentucky, authorities received hundreds of requests for assistance from stranded motorists, and there were over one hundred accidents. In Christian County alone, at least 138 motorists required assistance after sliding off roadways or getting stuck. At Paducah, the U.S. 45 bridge over the Ohio River to Illinois was closed. Barkley Regional Airport at Paducah was closed for a day. Schools were closed for the remainder of the week in most counties. Just north of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, a 10-car pileup was reported on U.S. Highway 67. Numerous vehicles slid off Interstate 55. The southbound lanes of Interstate 55 were blocked at the 105-mile marker after a tractor-trailer crashed. In Stoddard County, U.S. Highway 60 was blocked by a crash involving two tractor-trailers and a sport utility vehicle. The Missouri state highway patrol reported 32 stranded vehicles and 27 crashes even before the storm was over. Schools were closed for the remainder of the week in most counties.

FATALITIES/INJURIES: In Marshall County, an elderly man died after his car slid into a ditch and caught fire. In Graves County, two persons were injured in a two-vehicle accident on the Purchase Parkway. The parkway was closed for about an hour. Christian County reported 45 accidents in that county, including nine with injuries.

HISTORICAL RANKING: The 12.1 inches of snow at Paducah was the heaviest March snowstorm on record for that location. It was also the third largest snowstorm for any time of the year. This snowstorm was eclipsed only by the 14.2-inch snowstorm on Dec. 22-23 of 2004 and the 12.2-inch storm on January 16-17 of 1978. The 8.5 inches of snow at Evansville was the fourth biggest March snowstorm on record at that location. The March record was set in 1960, when 10.9 inches fell early in the month.



Photo courtesy AP (Interstate 24 in western Kentucky)

RECOVERY EFFORTS: Some of the coldest air recorded in the month of March invaded western Kentucky the day after the snowstorm, hampering snow removal efforts. The low temperature of 6 below zero at Paducah on March 6 was the coldest reading not only for the date, but also for the month of March. In Hickman, a 60-year-old man died of hypothermia while seeking shelter after a car accident (direct fatality). The man did not sustain any injuries in the crash, which occurred while snow was falling during the night. He was wearing a thin layer of clothes. His body was found up against a business the following afternoon. Wind chills dropped as low as 8 degrees above zero on the morning of his death. Road crews stopped spreading salt because of its ineffectiveness in the cold weather.

WEATHER MAP SYNOPSIS: In the wake of a strong cold front that passed through on the night of the 3rd, an arctic high pressure center moved southeast into the central Plains. A deep 500 mb trough progressed slowly eastward from the Rockies across the Plains. This trough was responsible for a sustained period of moist southwest flow aloft. The relatively moist air overrunning cold air near the surface set the stage for widespread moderate to heavy snow.