

Beat: Travel

Freak southern U.S. snowstorm leaves thousands of students, drivers stranded

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USPA News - About two inches (5 centimeters) of snow has crippled parts of the Southern United States with thousands of drivers in Georgia being stuck in their cars for 24-plus hours and Atlanta school children left stranded at schools and on buses overnight, emergency officials said Wednesday. The Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) has partnered with other state entities such as the Georgia State Patrol, Georgia National Guard, and the Georgia Department of Transportation to alleviate traffic issues caused by the snowstorm, that led to Georgia Governor Nathan Deal declaring a state of emergency. Authorities had no estimate for exactly how many people remained stuck in the gridlock for a second day on Wednesday.

However, more than 24 hours after the snow and ice hit the Atlanta Metro area, traffic maps were still painted red, reflecting the gridlock that kept many drivers in their cars overnight. Those stranded were provided with food and water while waiting for the gridlock to clear. As buses departed from schools on Tuesday afternoon, many quickly returned due to the severe road conditions, but thousands of students were forced to spend the night on buses after they too became stuck in the gridlock. Other students spent the night at school, but GEMA spokeswoman Lisa Janak Newman said all students were delivered home safely by Wednesday afternoon. "Yesterday, I ordered the Guard to prioritize stranded school buses full of students. With Humvees, they were able to get the buses moving and deliver food and water to the students," said Deal. "Last night, we had at least 95 immobile buses. We had cleared them all by this morning, and that was a big task. Our next task was getting students home from school, and now we have achieved that." The state was paralyzed by a similar winter storm in January of 2011, but that storm came on a Sunday when there were considerably less drivers on the roads. This time, numerous motorists abandoned their cars on highways to seek warm refuge, and officials are now working on a plan to remove abandoned cars that have made some places resemble scenes out of a 'zombie movie.' The Georgia State Patrol reported at least 1,254 accidents and 130 injuries during the storm. In Mississippi, emergency officials reported one storm-related traffic fatality in Smith County, while officials in North Carolina reported two fatalities from weather-related vehicle crashes. In Georgia, since Wednesday morning, hundreds of drivers have been assisted. "The Georgia Emergency Management Agency's number one priority is to clear the roads and get civilians home safely," said Newman. "My heart goes out to everyone still stranded at this time. We are using every available resource to get more people home." More than a day after the storm began, the agency issued a Civil Emergency Message that urged civilians not to travel unless it is an emergency. "The ice and snow has been compacted into solid sheets of ice which continues to cause treacherous road conditions," Wednesday's alert said. "Any melting that occurs this afternoon will refreeze tonight." It added: "Hundreds of vehicles and trucks are still stranded or abandoned on portions of the interstates and primary roads in the Atlanta Metro area. ... [GEMA] requests that travel be limited to emergencies only for your safety, and for the safety of emergency officials and Georgia Department of Transportation employees that continue to respond to the dangerous impacts of the winter storm."

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1851/freak-southern-us-snowstorm-leaves-thousands-of-students-drivers-stranded.html>

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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