High winds, mountain snows hits Northwest

DOUG ESSER - Associated Press - Associated Press

The strongest Northwest storm of the season blew in early Monday on winds that gusted to more than 80 mph on the coast, knocking out power in places and creating blizzard-like conditions in the mountains.

The storm is headed east along the U.S.-Canada border, said meteorologist Danny Mercer.

"It doesn't look like a big snow or wind producer for the rest of the U.S. It looks like the biggest impact was here," he said.

But another storm is splitting off from that — "part of the same trough" — and heading south. It's likely to bring snow along the Rockies, include the Boulder-Denver area, late Tuesday into Wednesday, Mercer said.

Weather in much of western Washington and western Oregon remained unsettled Monday.

Wet snow pellets that looked like hail hit an area of south Everett during the Monday evening commute, depositing ice along Interstate 5, said Greg Phipps, a Washington state Transportation Department spokesman. That snarled commuter traffic in both directions.

The highest winds hit Sunday evening with an 84 mph gust recorded at the mouth of the Columbia River and an 81 mph gust on the central Oregon coast, said meteorologist Scott Weishaar in Portland.

Winds early Monday hit 60 mph on the Washington coast and 55 mph in the south Puget Sound area, said meteorologist Ted Buehner in Seattle.

Winds brought tree limbs down on power lines. Seattle City Light had 11,000 customers out of service at one time. Puget Sound Energy had 17,000 outages, mostly in the south King County area, southeast of Seattle.

Portland General Electric responded to dozens of power outages in the metro area. Pacific Power had about 10,000 outages throughout western Oregon.

Winds knocked a tree onto a home in Lakewood, Wash., near where a 2-year-old was sleeping, but it missed the baby's crib. Winds also were blamed for sinking two boats on Lake Washington at Kirkland, Wash., and the fire department helped two people who were sleeping on one of the boats, KOMO Radio reported.

Heavy snow fell in the mountains. Accumulations from the storm that started Sunday were likely to total 2 to 3 feet by Tuesday morning in the Washington

Cascades, Buehner said.

Snow is already on the ground in parts of Eastern Washington, including Spokane, but downtown streets were clear by Monday afternoon.

"A wide variety of winter weather is clearly affecting the entire state," Buehner said. "It's the strongest storm of the year, so far."

Wind speeds of more than 60 mph were reported in Eastern Washington at Pullman on Monday morning, and power company Avista reported thousands of customers without power in its large service area. Winds of more than 50 mph were reported in Spokane, and a tree fell on two homes. No injuries were reported.

Winds delayed work on the Hanford nuclear reservation in southeast Washington. A large accumulation of tumbleweeds blocked some roadways, the Tri-City Herald reported. Washington Closure Hanford canceled outdoor environmental cleanup work because of the winds.

Snow accumulations in the Oregon Cascades will total 1 to 2 feet, Weishaar said.

Four construction workers at a cellphone tower project on Steens Mountain in southeast Oregon were stranded when their snow cat became stuck in a drift Saturday. They waded through waist-deep snow to reach a heated shelter with electricity.

Harney County rescuers were turned back both Sunday and Monday by white-out conditions. The weather was expected to improve Tuesday, said Matt Fine, Harney County search and rescue coordinator.

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Tim Fought in Portland and Nicholas K. Geranios in Spokane contributed to this report.

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