

WORST SNOWFALL OF WINTER TIES UP MOST ROADS HERE

Afflicts Much of East Coast
—First Emergency Since
'69 Declared by City

MANY MINOR ACCIDENTS

Medical Check-Up Canceled
by Nixon as He Is Caught

in Jam in Washington
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The heaviest snowstorm of the winter blustered over the metropolitan area yesterday, causing huge traffic jams and hundreds of minor vehicular accidents and prompting the city to declare first snow emergency in five years.

The storm, which had been expected to pass south of the city instead struck New York in the early afternoon. It forced the closing of the West Side Highway and the eastern half of the Long Island Expressway, and turned nearly all highways in the region into treacherous skidways.

The snow was part of a storm extending up from Virginia, with New York City and Long Island on its northern edge. Elsewhere on the Eastern Seaboard, the storm closed schools and slowed travel.

Nixon Trip Thwarted

In Washington, President Nixon set out from the White House by car in the morning for his annual physical check-up at the Bethesda Naval Medical Center in suburban Maryland. But driving snow and heavy traffic prompted him to turn back.

An aide later said the President saw at least four fender-bender accidents and watched cars skid and traffic slog at a snail's pace before ordering the chauffeur of his limousine to take him home. The aide said the long-delayed physical examination would be rescheduled.

By late afternoon, with more than three inches of snow on the ground and up to three more inches expected overnight, Mayor Beame declared the snow emergency and urged motorists to stay off the streets.

Anniversary of '69 Storm

"It's not going to be '69 all over again," said Herbert Elish, the Sanitation Commissioner, referring to the huge snowstorm on Feb. 9, 1969 — five years ago today—that left parts of Queens virtually isolated and the Lindsay administration embarrassed by the lack of preparedness.

The Sanitation Department had 238 salt spreaders and 570 snowplows at work yesterday, trying to cope in the afternoon with an accumulation of nearly one inch an hour.

The declaration of a snow emergency, which facilitates the clean-up, means that on designated snow-emergency

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streets — about 1,100 miles of the city's 6,000 miles of roadways — parking or standing is prohibited, and vehicles using them must be equipped with approved snow tires or chains.

The snow, combined with temperatures in the low twenties, left an icy glaze over streets and highways. And while railroad commuters encountered only slight delays, homebound motorists last night found themselves enmeshed in monumental traffic jams that doubled and in some cases tripled their travel time.

The National Weather Service predicted overnight snow accumulations of four to six inches in the city and on Long Island. Lighter falls were reported in Westchester County and along the Connecticut coast — a reversal of the customary pattern — though authorities warned of icy, hazardous driving conditions in both sections.

The heaviest falls were reported in southern and central New Jersey. More than eight inches of snow were forecast overnight for the South Jersey coast. Speed limits on the New Jersey Turnpike were cut to 35 miles an hour at midafternoon yesterday amid reports of scores of accidents. Many schools and offices in the Atlantic City area closed early.

A 'Mild Surprise'

A spokesman for the Weather Service here said the storm had not been forecast here because it had been expected to pass out to sea south of the city. The snow thus came as a "mild surprise," he said.

Snow flurries and temperatures in the high twenties were predicted for today, the spokesman said. Yesterday's high was only 24 degrees here, but it was much colder upstate—12 below zero in Watertown and 11 below in Massena.

The Nassau County Executive, Ralph G. Caso, declared a snow emergency yesterday, prohibiting all but emergency parking on designated roads. In the late afternoon, travel on the Long Island Expressway was treacherous or impossible.

The eastern half of the expressway, east of Exit 60 in Ronkonkoma, was closed in both directions by early evening. The Suffolk County police reported 288 minor accidents in the county between 2 and 5:30 P.M.

"Everything is stopped," said a Nassau County police spokesman when asked about the Long Island Expressway traffic in Nassau. "What would normally take five minutes to travel on the expressway is now taking 45 minutes."

The Long Island Rail Road reported only slight delays during its evening rush period, and the Penn Central reported virtually no trouble. But it was a different story for air travelers and motorists.

Eastern Airlines shut down its shuttle services to Washington and Boston and La Guardia Airport had to divert arrivals to other landing sites in the afternoon. At Kennedy International and Newark International Airports, departure and arrival delays ranged up to 35 minutes.

A 15-car accident on the Manhattan Bridge cut off Manhattan-bound traffic at midafternoon and backed up cars into downtown Brooklyn. Major tie-ups also were reported on Northern Boulevard in Queens, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive on Manhattan's East Side and many other major arteries around the city.

The West Side Highway and the Henry Hudson Parkway 125th Street were closed in midafternoon, and the result was a traffic jam that spread virtually all over the West Side. Long lines of cars at gasoline stations across the metropolitan area complicated the problem of traffic jams and snow-plowing.

Fuel Storage a Factor

Dwindling gasoline supplies in northwestern New Jersey threatened last night to idle most of the area's snow-removal equipment. Private contractors, who do most of the snow-plowing, reported having fuel for only about four hours of operations.

Those plows that were in operation were hindered by heavy traffic, which backed up for miles in the evening on Routes 53, 10 and 202 in Morris County.

The city's Traffic Department announced that three-hour alternate-side-of-the-street parking regulations would be suspended today. Queensboro Community College in Bayside called off classes last night and today because of the storm, and Roosevelt Raceway canceled its schedule last night.