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Metro

# October storm holds lasting grip

## 3 dead; many thousands in state still without power

By **David Abel and Martine Powers** | GLOBE STAFF    OCTOBER 31, 2011

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MATTHEW CAVANAUGH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Gary Rzab cleared a path yesterday in his yard in Plainfield, which was buried with 30.8 inches of snow, the most in the state.**

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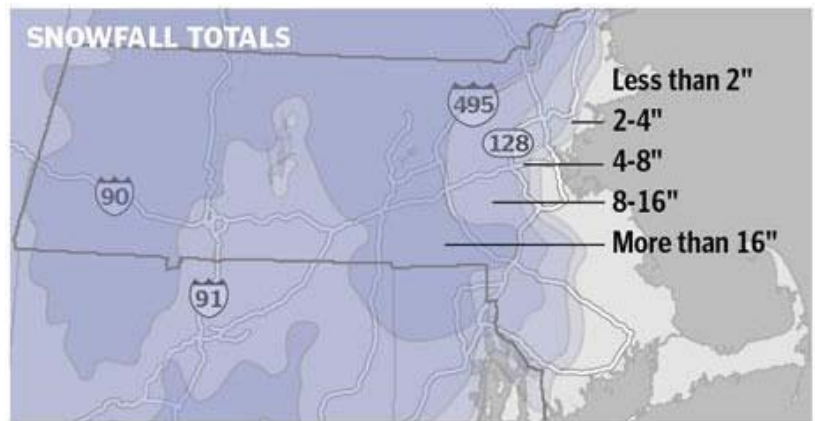
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A day after the onslaught of a record-setting autumn nor'easter, more than 621,000 customers in the state remained without power yesterday, and officials said it could be days before many of them have it restored.

They are among the more than 3.2 million homes and businesses on the East Coast to lose electricity.

At least three people in Massachusetts died as a result of the storm, authorities said, and Governor Deval Patrick mobilized 700 members of the National Guard to help remove fallen trees and clear roads.

“We’ve never seen anything like this at this time of the year,” said Peter Judge, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Emergency Management



Agency. "This storm would have been out of the ordinary in the heart of winter."

He said the heavy snow felled hundreds if not thousands of trees around the state, snapping power lines along a vast stretch of central and western Massachusetts.

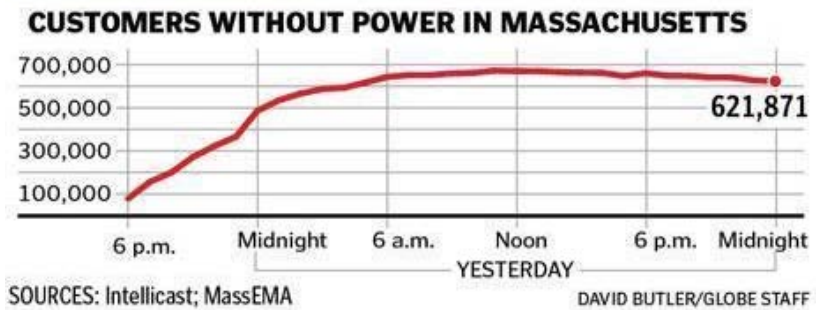
Among the hardest-hit communities was Athol, where most of the 11,000 residents were without power last night.

Steven Roach, 46, said his neighborhood looked like a battle zone, with power lines and branches down on nearly every road.

"We've seen snowflakes in October before, but not a devastating storm like this," said Roach, who had his greenhouse crushed under the weight of the wet, heavy snow, and had to use a chainsaw to get his car out of his driveway.

The state opened more than a dozen shelters from Reading to Greenfield, where nearly 100 residents took refuge. Transportation officials said they used more than 2,000 pieces of equipment to clear snow on state roads, at least nine of which had to be closed yesterday.

The state Department of Conservation and Recreation sent about 25 crews to join the Guard and teams of contractors



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to remove fallen trees and make other repairs.

“What makes this storm different is that the damage to trees is much more widespread than with the tornadoes or other recent storms,” said the department’s commissioner, Edward M. Lambert Jr. “Because many of the trees still have leaves, the weight of the snow really affected trees.”

At a noon news conference in Agawam, Patrick, who declared a state of emergency Saturday night, said it would probably be days before power is restored for most homes and businesses. He explained that the damage was unlike the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene, when repairs on a few central power lines restored electricity to whole neighborhoods.

“This is a house-by-house, branch-by-branch kind of response,” Patrick said.

As of midnight, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency said there was a total of 621,871 customers without power. The breakdown was National Grid, 408,614; Western Massachusetts Electric, 127,767; NStar, 70,111; and Unitil, 15,379.

“Due to the difficult driving conditions, downed trees, and severe damage experienced on our system, we’re anticipating our power restoration effort will last into the work week,” said Caroline Allen, an NStar spokeswoman, in a statement.

In Springfield, a 20-year-old man was electrocuted after leaving his vehicle in traffic and touching a guardrail that had been electrified by a downed wire. Police identified the man yesterday as Jeffrey Mattarazzo of Springfield.

Two people also died in a car crash in Falmouth shortly after midnight when their vehicle hit a tree, police said.

Although “there may have been other factors,” inclement weather conditions contributed to the crash, Officer Jamie Livingston said. The victims’ names were being withheld until family had been contacted.

About 150 accidents were reported on state-administered roads overnight, which is more than usual but a normal amount for such a storm, said Trooper Thomas Murphy, a State Police spokesman.

Off the coast, the storm generated howling winds and big waves. The Coast Guard had to rescue two Canadian sailors whose sailboat engine failed as they tried to reach Provincetown Harbor.

At the height of the whiteout around 10 p.m. on Saturday, a Chicago-Boston train was stranded by a rockslide in the town of Palmer. Amtrak officials said they did not know if the slide was weather-related. The passengers weren't able to leave the train until 10:50 a.m. yesterday.

Amtrak, which had to clear trees that fell on tracks and power wires at several locations, suspended service until further notice between Boston and Providence; between New Haven and Springfield; and between Harrisburg, Pa., and Philadelphia.

In Boston, Logan International Airport got only about an inch of snow. The MBTA ran smoothly throughout the morning, spokesman Joe Pesaturo wrote in an e-mail.

"MBTA crews did a great job early this morning, removing tree limbs that were leaning on overhead wires along the D branch of the Green Line," Pesaturo wrote.

Sara Lavoie, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Transportation, said the storm caused delays on the Fitchburg and Haverhill commuter lines because of signal problems, downed trees, and electrical outages. Both lines, as well as the Worcester-Framingham route, are expected to experience delays during this morning's commute.

She said there were also long lines for gas at service stations on the Massachusetts Turnpike, because other stations in the area had lost power.

The storm also took a toll on the local news media.

The Boston Globe will publish today's Boston Herald, said Robert Powers, a Globe spokesman.

"We have agreed to print [today's] Boston Herald as a result of a power outage at the production plant where the Herald is normally produced," he said, noting the agreement is "unrelated to ongoing discussions" about the Globe's printing the Herald in the future.

The early snow also took a toll on the Occupy Boston protesters in Dewey Square, causing several tents to collapse and a few people to be taken to local shelters.

"It was a rough night last night," said Barbara Ferrer, Boston's health commissioner. "We're worried about hypothermia. But it's a well-organized camp. They are obviously very focused on health and safety issues."

Lance Franck, a volunteer at the National Weather Service in Taunton, said Jaffrey, N.H., led the region with a record 31.4 inches of snow. In Massachusetts, Plainfield reported 30.8 inches of snow, more than

anywhere else in the state, while Ashfield received 25.5, and Tolland had 25.

With 14.6 inches, Worcester nearly doubled its previous record for the most snow ever recorded on an October day. Worcester normally averages two-tenths of an inch of snow in October.

“There hasn’t been anything like this before in October, and our records go back more than a century,” Franck said. “To put it in perspective, it’s extraordinary. We shattered records for October snowfalls.”

In Orange, Richard Sheridan was one of the town’s 8,000 residents who had been without power since Saturday afternoon.

Everywhere he went in the small town in central Massachusetts, trees and branches were blocking roads or had severed power lines. The heavy snow took down maple, apple, and cherry trees in his yard and driveway.

In Amherst, the University of Massachusetts campus is closed today “due to aftermath of the snowstorm,” the school announced on its website last night.

In Plainfield, where a mound of snow buried the pumpkins on her porch, Laura Kane’s children proposed replacing the hanging ghosts and other Halloween decor with wreaths and Christmas ornaments. Instead, the youngsters built a snowman, using a pumpkin for the head.

“It looks like winter, but before it’s supposed to start,” said Kane, 31, in a phone interview. “It’s really surreal. Nobody was ready for this.”

*Martin Finucane of the Globe staff and Globe correspondents Evan Allen, Miriam Valverde, Christopher J. Girard, Matt Byrne, and Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report. David Abel can be reached at [dabel@globe.com](mailto:dabel@globe.com).*

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