

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

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**LAKE-EFFECT STORM**

## ENOUGH ALREADY

Storm-ravaged region sees death toll rise to 10 as roofs start caving in

BY MAKI BECKER AND MATT SPINA / NEWS STAFF REPORTERS



Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News

**On Pardee Avenue in hard-hit Lancaster, where snow may reach the 7-foot level, a resident plows his driveway as Western New York awaits relief from historic lake-effect storm.**

Roofs caved in under the unbearable weight of 5, 6 even 7 feet of snow.

Food was scarce, people were running out of medicine and thousands lost power, at least for a few hours.

And the death toll from back-to-back blasts of a historic lake-effect storm rose to 10.

Police begged drivers to abide by driving bans. The county executive scolded the National Football League about reports the league was encouraging the Bills to play at Ralph Wilson Stadium this Sunday as scheduled, but Thursday night, it was announced that the game with the New York Jets would be played Monday night in Detroit.

Through it all, thousands of people remained snowbound in their homes, many of them unable to even open their doors because of snow piled up.

“Get us out!” pleaded Rosann Sessamen, 56, who shares a duplex with her sister, Colleen Roger, and their dog and two cats in Ridgewood Village, at Abbott and Ridge roads in Lackawanna.

Sessamen and about a half-million people who have endured the fury of the twin storms have reached a breaking point.

As of Thursday night, the sisters had been trapped in their home for two days with snow at least 5 feet high completely blocking their front and side doors and going halfway up the windows. They have food and water and the heat is on, but they were growing increasingly anxious as they hear the rumble of plows nearby.

“I know it’s an act of God,” said Sessamen, a former nurse who has multiple sclerosis. “But this is enough.”

Officials assured the public that they were doing everything they can.

More than 5,000 people were assisting in the recovery effort, the majority of them digging out and hauling away the snow, Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz said an afternoon news conference. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo even spent the night in the Buffalo area and continued to keep tabs on what he said was one of the biggest relief efforts in New York State history. Some roads were finally passable Thursday as high-lifts hauled away snow and plows were finally able to get into start clearing paths.

But after a second lake-effect storm dumped as much as an additional 3 feet on the snow-weary heart of Erie County where some areas had already logged 5 feet earlier in the week, there wasn’t much

more people could take.

## Collapsing roofs

Roofs began to give way under the weight of the snow.

A “large collapse” was reported at the Flexovit plant by county officials reported shortly before 9 p.m.

Greenhouses at the Amos Zittel & Sons operations in Eden collapsed under the weight of the snow, causing millions of dollars in losses to plants being grown for spring that would be shipped all over the country. “We’ve lost so much,” said Paul Zittel, a third-generation member of the family. “There’s nothing we can grow right now. It’s millions of dollars we’re going to lose. I have never seen anything like this before.”

There were other unconfirmed reports of other barns collapsing and cows being trapped in the snow at farms throughout Eden.

Two dozen roof collapses have been reported throughout the county, including a home in Depew. An additional couple of dozen structures, among them an eight-unit apartment building in Lancaster, were believed to be in danger of having their roofs collapse.

The BJ’s Wholesale Club on Milestrip Road in Blasdell incurred structural damage, and the roof collapsed at Schmidt’s Collision & Glass on Camp Road in Hamburg.

Carports attached to mobile homes in West Seneca and Cheektowaga crumpled.

“In one case, we had to rip the door open,” Tom Held, a member of Union Fire Company, said after leaving a scene on Burgundy Lane. “Last night, we had to cut (a carport) away so we could get to the door.”

The same problem plagued Carefree Park Estates, also on Union Road, where Bellevue firefighters, aided by firefighters from outside the area, transported an injured 86-year-old Nick Buccirose from his home after his carport collapsed Thursday morning.

Ron Lindner pointed to a neighbor’s carport: “Hers went yesterday.” He pointed to another: “His went at 10:30 the day before.”

Volunteer firefighters aided Thursday in the evacuation of about 130 residents of the Garden Gate Health Care Facility on Union in Cheektowaga after the building showed signs of structural damage. A warehouse next door had collapsed the

night before.

As reports of the roof collapses hit the media, some residents took matters into their own hands, risking injury by climbing onto peaks to shovel away the 6-foot layer that strains rafters and clogs vents.

In snow-clogged South Buffalo, a man fell 2½ stories in the 100 block of Stevenson Street. He was rushed to a hospital just before noon Thursday.

Some local professionals familiar with building codes and construction standards say homeowners in the hardest-hit areas, especially those with low-pitched roofs, should be wary of the weight atop their wood-frame houses.

“There’s a whole level of concerns here, for sure,” architect David Sutton said when reached at his office in Williamsville. Building codes are written with the heaviest storms in mind, he said, but this has been an uncommonly heavy storm.

“You are talking about 6 feet of snow on a roof,” said Larry LaDuca, general manager at Natale Builders, which builds houses with steeper pitches. LaDuca acknowledged that he is concerned about a house he owns in Cheektowaga, built in 1955.

The low-pitched roofs that are common in the post-World War II tracts in hard-hit Cheektowaga, Lancaster and West Seneca now support hundreds of extra pounds, Sutton and LaDuca said.

Then there’s the threat of rain this weekend, which will only add weight.

### **Frayed nerves**

The county executive wasn’t mincing his words when he blasted the NFL over the possibility that the Bills game scheduled for Sunday in Orchard Park would go on as planned.

“If the NFL is trying to push the Bills – and I don’t think the Bills are trying to push it – if the NFL is trying to push the Bills to hold a football game, while we’re in the middle of an emergency, shame on the NFL,” Poloncarz said at a news conference in the County Emergency Operations Center in Cheektowaga. “Simple as that. We’re in a major emergency. We’ve had (10) deaths. We still might have people in their vehicles. We have roofs collapsing.”

But by evening, the league announced that the Bills-Jets game would be played Monday night in Detroit.

Officials also were venting their frustrations as residents bombarded them with complaints about delays in snow removal while they waited for help from outside.

A reverse 911 call went out from the Town of Ham-

burg, sent around 6:30 p.m.: “Our Highway Department has requested assistance, however, has received none ... We requested additional resources quadrupling the capacity of our Highway Department. In as much as every other community in Erie County impacted by the storm had the same idea, we received no help.”

At a news conference earlier Thursday, Under-sheriff Mark N. Wiperman called motorists who disobeyed driving bans and ended up having to be rescued from ditches “selfish.”

Cheektowaga police pleaded with the public on a Facebook post to abide by the travel ban south of Broadway. Many roads have been cleared, but emergency responders said they to be reserved for the snow removal operation. “We understand that many are frustrated but, please, obey the ban,” it read.

Dispatchers in Lancaster, where snow totals were expected to end up at least at the 7-foot level, fielded more than 100 requests for help for everything from collapsed roofs and clogged furnaces to carbon monoxide alarm activations, in addition to 25 ambulance calls. Police handled four car accidents, helped three stranded motorists and dealt with two men fighting on Lombardy Street.

They all knew more problems lay ahead as the lake-effect storm continued to blanket the lower Southtowns and the Southern Tier with heavy snow through midnight.

The Thruway from the Pennsylvania state line to Henrietta remained closed, as did Routes 5, 219 and 400 and portions of the Youngmann Highway and the Niagara Thruway. Travel bans stayed in effect and many school districts, including the Buffalo Public Schools and those in the hard-hit area, announced they would be closed for a fourth straight snow day today.

In Elma, there were worries of power failures as heavy snow fell late Thursday. “We’re starting to see tree branches breaking and hitting the power lines,” said Brian Caradori, president of the Elma Fire Company.

And then there was the flood watch beginning today as rain and temperatures in the 50s were expected to melt the deep snowpack. But small signs surfaced that things were returning to normal.

The National Weather Service’s lake-effect warning for the region was over as of 1 a.m. today.

Buffalo Public Works Commissioner Steven J. Stepniak said the city was hoping to have most, if not all, South Buffalo streets cleared this weekend. A 75-year-old South Buffalo woman who has been

missing for three days was found safe and in good health, city officials announced Thursday.

Buffalo Niagara International Airport in Cheektowaga was expected to be in full operation today. Some Amtrak service was back Thursday.

And a new Twitter hashtag was competing with

#snowvember, social media's unofficial name for the double storms. The new one: #WeAreBuffalo.

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*News Staff Reporters James Staas, Janice L. Habuda, Karen Robinson and Jay Tokasz contributed to this report.*