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One Storm Down, One on the Way

4 to 6 Inches of Snow Possible Later Today

By Fred Barbash
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A second winter storm -- potentially whiter, wider, deeper and longer than this morning's -- moved toward the Washington area this afternoon with some potential to begin during the Friday rush hour and continue all day Saturday.

Estimates of the total snowfall in store for the region varied from three to six inches. Midday forecasts suggested that it would cover a larger part of the region than the storm this morning.

Today's early morning weather was blast or blip, depending on where you lived or traveled. It slogged across the region overnight, dropping a patchwork of snow, sleet and cold rain.

Eight inches of snow fell in Darnestown in northern Montgomery County; the District got a dusting and some slush, at most; parts of Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties got nothing at all.

There was method to the pattern, however, said Mark Hoekzema, chief meteorologist for Weatherbug, a high-tech business that provides highly localized weather information to individuals and businesses. Winds coming off a relatively warm Atlantic tended to keep temperatures to the southeast higher, limiting the ice and snow. Northern and western suburbs got no such dispensation.

Hoekzema said the second storm will probably be snowier across the area because the winds will blow in from the north, where temperatures are cooler.

While state championship football games in Maryland and semifinal football matchups in Virginia scheduled for Friday night and Saturday have been postponed, at least there will be no schools to close.

This morning, most of the school systems in the area, except for the District, Prince George's County, Arlington and Alexandria, shut down or delayed opening.

And the mix of the morning produced a standard mix of complaints.

Some early Montgomery County callers to the Post newsroom complained about that county's shutdown, wondering where the snow was.

Others in the same county reported "blizzard" conditions though nothing there, strictly speaking, resembled a blizzard.

By 4:55 am in Montgomery County, school officials posted online that all schools would be closed. "It's

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a massive amount of snow and I haven't seen a plow yet," Brian Porter, the school system's public information officer, said several hours later. He had used a broom to dust off several inches of snow from his car and driveway.

Porter said all schools had to be closed because the same school buses are used to transport children throughout the county.

"Weather is not strictly localized for us. It is a countywide phenomenon that has to be dealt with on a system wide basis."

The same was true in Anne Arundel County, where the schools also closed. Although the northern portions of the county saw significant snow, much of the central and southern areas got only rain.

"There are huge differences," said Jane Beckett Donohue, public information officer for the Anne Arundel school system. "We can't close part of the county and leave others open. There's just no efficient way."

The heaviest snowfalls east of the mountains were in a range of four to eight inches, north and west of the city.

An army of plows and trucks were spotted treating the roads (although complaints proliferated about the absence of same.) But they could not prevent the slipping and sliding and road spray that caused numerous accidents, according to law enforcement authorities.

I-270 and I-66 were particularly hard hit with truck accidents. A six car pile-up was reported at 7 a.m. on I-370 in Montgomery County.

And as morning rush hour began, the accidents caused backups and sudden stops-and-starts, which, in turn, produced more accidents.

Washington Post reporters acting as spotters reflected the variety of the day.

"We've got nine inches in Ashburn, Va.," said one, "and the snow (large flakes) is still coming down hard, mixed with freezing rain. Secondary roads have not been plowed once. Primary roads have packed snow and slush banks between lanes. They are littered with stuck cars. The Dulles Greenway is the only thing passable and it's only got one clear lane, with cars going about 15 miles an hour."

Another described driving suddenly into a "wall" of snow as he entered Reston after an otherwise uneventful ride through rain and slush from Washington.

A correspondent in Oakton in Virginia said there was slightly less than an inch.

Another in Chevy Chase in the District reported a "dusting."

A mile away, in Tenleytown in Washington, there was half an inch -- of slush only.

A Gaithersburg resident with a ruler measured a full five inches.

Near the Chain Bridge in Washington there was nothing but rain.

But close by, in McLean, there was an inch of snow.

The storm was connected to a larger system that swept across the mountain regions of North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia early Friday. It's effects were felt north from Baltimore to New York and storm warnings or watches were posted all the way to Maine.

Staff writer Vikki Ortiz contributed to this report.

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