

More than 45,000 homes in Montreal area without power Tuesday night

Keep your stairs clear of ice, Urgences Santé urges, saying employees who are responding to emergencies have had to remove ice from the stairs before entering homes.



MONTREAL GAZETTE

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Freezing rain marked the beginning and the end of the day in Montreal on Tuesday.

Montreal woke up to a city covered in a coat of ice, with all island school boards canceling classes and many pedestrians having a hard time getting around.

Just as the city was getting back on its feet, a late-day band of freezing rain caused power outages that left more than 45,000 homes in Montreal and the Montérégie region without power on Tuesday night.

As of 9 p.m., blackouts were affecting 36,490 Hydro-Québec customers in the Montérégie, south of Montreal, as well as 8,800 on Montreal Island. In Montreal, the outages were concentrated in Verdun (3,767 customers), Pierrefonds (2,215) and Beaconsfield (1,855 homes were without electricity).

Hydro-Québec said it expected to restore power on Tuesday night.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Urgences Santé had responded to about 25 calls in Montreal and Laval after pedestrians had fallen on icy sidewalks.

In some cases, people were transported to a hospital for fractures, said spokesperson Valérie Tremblay.

Tremblay asked the public to make sure their stairs are clear of ice because Urgences Santé employees who are responding to emergencies have had to remove ice from the stairs before entering homes.

She also suggested that people take the time to remove ice from the stairs of elderly neighbours to help prevent falls.

Anyone venturing out Tuesday should consider using crampons, she suggested.



Marie-Philippe Bois chips away at ice in her side window of her car on Jean Talon Blvd. Jan. 23, 2018. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Montreal schools shut down

All Montreal area school boards — the English Montreal School Board, Lester B. Pearson School Board, Commission scolaire de Laval, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, Riverside School Board, Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, and Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île — closed their schools and offices. That decision was made after the director generals held a conference call at 4:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

But the English Montreal School Board had decided independently to close its schools and adult centres after listening to the forecast Monday night and Tuesday morning.

At 5 a.m. Tuesday, board spokesperson Michael Cohen sent out a recorded telephone message to more than 30,000 students and employees notifying them of the school closures. He also sent out a mass email, posted the news on Facebook and Twitter and called radio stations and television networks with morning shows.

“It took 15 minutes and everyone had received a phone call,” he said. “It was the first time we did a call out to every single home to tell them that school has been closed.”

On Monday night, parents were posting on the board’s Facebook page, asking whether schools would be shut, and in some cases requesting closures because they were worried about the freezing rain.

“We had a lot of feedback on our social media channels and our Facebook page,” Cohen said. “We posted a message (Monday night) saying we were watching the situation closely and to stay tuned. Within an hour, 10,000 people had viewed that post and dozens and dozens were commenting. It’s a new way to get the pulse of our community.”



Tonny Botelho uses small ice axe to chip away ice on his Clark Ave. home Jan. 23, 2018.

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Highways and hydro

Despite the poor condition of some sidewalks in residential areas, Montreal police said they haven’t received any calls to help injured pedestrians.

“Sometimes we get called first because Urgences Santé is busy,” said Constable Benoit Boiselle.

City spokesperson Philippe Sabourin acknowledged that many sidewalks on secondary streets remained covered in snow and ice early Tuesday, but added their condition was part of plan the city had to deal with the cocktail of weather conditions that prevailed between Monday night and Tuesday morning.

“We adopted a ‘Scott towel,’ approach,” he said. “Rather than plow away the snow that fell on Monday night, we left it there to absorb the freezing rain we knew was going to fall afterward.”

Sabourin said sidewalk plows equipped with abrasive spreaders were deployed Tuesday morning to remove the snow and its shell of ice and scatter a mix of salt and grit onto the cleared sidewalks.

“If we had cleared the snow immediately, the ice would have been far more difficult to remove once the temperature dropped (on Tuesday night),” he said.



Gino Andreoli scrapes ice chunks from the roof of his car on 6th Ave. in Montreal Jan. 23, 2018. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Across Quebec, about 10,500 Hydro-Québec customers were without power Tuesday evening, mostly because the freezing rain caused tree branches to fall on power lines. However, there are far fewer outages than the utility

expected because there was little wind when the freezing rain fell overnight on Monday, said Hydro-Québec spokesperson Francis Labbé.

The roads were less busy than usual as commuters heeded warnings to restrict travel. School closings throughout much of southern Quebec has also resulted in fewer cars on the roads, said Sgt. Ingrid Asselin of the Sûreté du Québec.

Some motorists have ended up in the ditch while driving on slippery highways outside Montreal, but there have been no major accidents, she said.

In regions outside Montreal, SQ officers are driving on highways with their lights flashing instructing motorists to slow down.

While main thoroughfares in Montreal had been plowed overnight, the ensuing freezing rendered road surfaces treacherous. Side streets were more problematic and many sidewalks were either unplowed over a heavy layer of ice.

Late Monday night, Transports Québec reported that road conditions in southwestern Quebec were a mix of snow and ice on Highways 10, 15, 20, 30, 35 and 40. Highways 112, 116 and 132 in the Montérégie were reported as being quite icy.

At Trudeau airport, scores of departures (<http://www.admtl.com/en/flights/departures>) scheduled for this morning were cancelled or delayed and the outlook was just as grim for arrivals. (<http://www.admtl.com/en/flights/arrivals>)



Albert Saccomani shovels his Montreal walkway while wearing his summer attire of sneakers and shorts, Jan. 23, 2018. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

NDP caucus called off

Federal New Democrats have cancelled a three-day caucus meeting that was to begin Tuesday in Saguenay because of poor weather descending on the region.

Several flights to the area about 200 kilometres north of Quebec City have been cancelled, leaving many NDP MPs unable to get to Saguenay in time for the meetings.

Environment Canada issued a winter storm warning for the Saguenay area Monday night, which said 25 to 40 centimetres of snow and blowing snow were expected over parts of central and eastern Quebec through Wednesday.

A spokeswoman for the NDP said the party would try to hold its caucus later this week in Ottawa.

“Unfortunately, the storm has had an impressive impact on the movement of our MPs in the rest of Canada,” said NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh.

“I am extremely disappointed that we have been forced to postpone our visit to Saguenay. I was really looking forward to coming back to the area, especially after being so well received in the fall.” he added.

Presse Canadienne and the Canadian Press contributed to this report.

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Man walk towards downtown Montreal via Jeanne Mance near Mount Royal Jan. 23, 2018.

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