



OLD MAN WINTER HAMMERS MARITIMES

You and your folks are about to settle in for a movie. Suddenly, your mum notices water on the driveway. A lot of water. Oh no! The water in the bay is rising fast! Is it a **storm surge**?

Your dad runs out to move the truck to higher ground. But it's useless. Within minutes, there's ocean water pouring across the kitchen floor. And it's rising every minute! You hurry to the truck through waist-high water. Once you're all in, you gun the engine and get the heck out of there.

STORM CAUSES HAVOC

Heavy snow, high winds and freezing rain tore through Eastern Canada in early January. Streets turned to ice. Blowing snow created whiteout conditions, making driving hazardous. In one Nova Scotia town, winds gusted up to 163 km/hour – as fast as a Category 2 hurricane. Flights were cancelled or delayed.

The storm knocked out power for thousands of people living in the region. Power lines collapsed under the weight of wet snow, which fell more than half a metre deep in some places. Many people couldn't turn on their lights or heat their homes. In Prince Edward Island, 20,000 homes lost power. In New Brunswick, another 10,000 people had no electricity.

It was a cold, wet mess.

WRECKAGE LEFT BEHIND

The storm's ferocity claimed three lives. One Nova Scotia man froze to

death just outside his house. Another Nova Scotian was poisoned by **carbon monoxide** fumes when he and his partner tried to heat their home with a generator. And a woman in Prince Edward Island died when she was accidentally struck by a snowplow.

A huge storm surge flooded homes in Port Elgin, N.B. The town of 500 is located at the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Officials declared a temporary **state of emergency** and ordered 25 homes evacuated.

"Cottages were opened up, buckled, destroyed," said one man whose cottage was smashed by the storm. "My brother-in-law's cottage, [the storm] tore the sun porch off, moved it back into a tree . . . it's destroyed."

DID YOU KNOW?

Category 2 hurricanes can lift a house, damage trees and signs, and tear small boats from their moorings.

Snow and ice moved another resident's cottage 30 metres up the road.

STORM MECHANICS

The New Year storm had been fairly mild as it moved across Ontario. But by the time it hit the East Coast, the storm had picked up more moisture – and greater wind speed. Weather experts were calling it a "weather bomb."

"A weather bomb is when you get a low-pressure system that all of a

sudden strengthens dramatically," said CBC **meteorologist** Johanna Wagstaffe. "And that's exactly what happened when this low-pressure system just got to the coast and basically just picked up all of that water."

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Utility companies had restored power to most communities by the day after the storm. Municipalities cleared roads and threw down salt to melt the ice. Governments declared the state of emergency over.

But the maritime provinces aren't out of the woods yet. January and February are typically the coldest and stormiest months of the year.

"This time of year, we have a good supply of cold air over Quebec and Labrador, and we still have fairly warm temperatures coming from the Gulf Stream," explained Environment Canada meteorologist Bob Robichaud.

"There's a huge temperature contrast over a relatively short distance, and that's how storms develop." ★

DEFINITIONS

CARBON MONOXIDE: a colourless, odorless and toxic gas; the by-product of burning fossil fuels

GULF STREAM: a powerful, warm Atlantic Ocean current that sweeps north from the Gulf of Mexico

METEOROLOGIST: a specialist who studies processes in the Earth's atmosphere that result in weather

STATE OF EMERGENCY: (in the case of natural disasters) a government decision that orders government agencies to implement emergency preparedness plans

STORM SURGE: an offshore rise of water associated with a low pressure weather system; caused primarily by high winds pushing on the ocean's surface



QUESTIONS

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ANSWER THE FOLLOWING IN COMPLETE SENTENCES:

1. What were meteorologists calling the storm that hit Atlantic Canada in early January?

2. Briefly describe the impact of the storm on the maritime region.

3. Explain why the maritime provinces aren't "out of the woods" yet.

4. What caused the storm to intensify as it moved into Eastern Canada?

5. How did the region work to recover from the storm?

6. As you see it, how much responsibility should governments bear in keeping people safe from extreme weather incidents? How much responsibility should individual citizens bear?
