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Worst freeze since 1963 — and may go on

Twelve inches of undrifted snow and ground temperatures of minus 14 degrees C were recorded during last weekend's blizzard. It was the worst winter freeze-up since 1963 and there could be worse to come.

The Halesowen Climatological Station says that the freezing conditions of 1963 lasted until March. This winter could be just as lengthy.

Blizzard conditions went on for 24 hours from 9 o'clock on Friday morning until the same time on Saturday, with continual snow throughout.

DEEP SNOWDRIFTS

The temperature went below freezing last Wednesday and did not rise above that all weekend. Snowdrifts of up to three feet made many roads in the Dudley area impassable.

Wind speed went frequently to gale force and by Monday there had been 123 hours of continual frost, with a minimum air temperature of minus 9.7 degrees C.

Ground was frozen to two inches, so any snow which did thaw ran off the ice.

Minus 14: record low for region

Temperatures plunged to a new low in the Black Country last week.

Early on Thursday morning, when thick freezing fog engulfed the region, the air temperature was minus 14 degrees C (6.8 degrees F).

Halesowen Climatological Station said this broke the previous record low of minus 13.19 degrees C which was recorded in January 1963.

This was the big freeze that resulted in thousands of burst pipes in homes, offices and factories.

When the thaw came at the weekend, emergency services were inundated with thousands of calls from people suffering flooding and damage.

On Saturday local fire stations were on constant call and firemen spent long hours pumping out flooded premises.

Dudley Council workers were called out to up to 5,000 cases of burst pipes and they worked round the clock to deal with the massive demand for repair work.

Private plumbing

companies were overwhelmed with calls to repair burst pipes and water tanks.

PROBLEMS

Even when the thaw came many householders still had problems. In Cobden Street, Wollaston, three homes were without water for five days. One of the residents, a 92-year-old woman, had to be supplied with drinking and washing water by neighbours.

The Climatological Station said that the week from January 8 to January 15 was the coldest recorded in this area since the 1940s. Temperatures stayed below freezing during the whole of this period except for a brief respite of two hours.

"It was a total of 218 hours of sub-zero temperatures," said a weather expert.

On three occasions the air temperature fell below minus 10 degrees C. The ground temperature went, as low as minus 16.8 degrees C.

January will go into weather record books

So fickle is our climate that within three weeks of experiencing the lowest temperatures for probably 300 years, we have the fourth warmest January day on record.

The range in air temperature was from minus 14C (6F) on the 15th to 12.2C (54F) on the 31st, and quite exceptional for the Halesowen Climatological Station. Yet, despite this, averages have not been abnormal, the mean maximum being 5.7C (42F) which is the 25 year average for January.

BLIZZARD

Sixteen air frosts and 19 ground frosts occurred, with the most severe, minus 16.8C (2F) on the

14th. Even the soil froze to a depth of six inches at this time.

Rainfall at 58mm (2.30 ins) was 85 per cent of the expected total, with over 27mm (1.06 ins) falling as snow, most of this during the severe blizzard of the 8th.

Level snow was one foot deep, with drifts of four feet after this, and snow lying on 11 days during the month.

Winds were stronger than usual gusting to 39 mph on January 8.

Sunshine was slightly up on normal, at 47 hours with 7.6 hours on the 13th. In all 13 days were totally sunless in a month which will go into the records as one of severe cold.