

New Index Confirms It: This Winter Is Miserable

BY SETH BORENSTEIN AND JEFF KAROUB
Associated Press

DETROIT — A new winter misery index confirms what many Americans in the Midwest and East know in their all-too-chilled bones: This has been one of the harshest winters of our lifetimes.

And nowhere has been hit harder, relatively, than Detroit.

Sure Chicago, Indianapolis and Philadelphia and Moline, Ill., are in the midst of their third most extreme winters in more than 60 years. But Detroit, a city that is trying to crawl out of bankruptcy, is also slogging through what so far is the most extreme winter it has had since Harry Truman was president, at least, according to a winter extremity index created by a National Weather Service meteorologist Barbara Mayes Boustead.

The index is based on cold temperatures and snowfall. And so far Detroit has had more than 6 1/2 feet of snow and 100 days when the thermometer plunged below the freezing mark. Of two dozen cities studied,

Detroit alone is in the middle of its harshest winter since 1950.

In better weather, downtown Detroit's riverfront walk bustles with bicyclists, runners, walkers and people watchers. Lunchtime on Tuesday wasn't better weather. With temperatures in the low 20s and a biting wind, Paul Welch was practically alone on his 2-mile trek. He was mostly dressed for the weather, with a fleece pullover, ski jacket and gloves — but no hat. Consequently, his face was pink.

"My ears are freezing," said Welch, 52, who works nearby at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan's headquarters. "I didn't think it was going to be quite this windy when I got out here but ... I found out, yeah, it's pretty bad."

Boustead, a former Detroit-area resident who now works in Omaha, Neb., created the index a couple years ago to judge the sever-

ity of winters. Omaha, by the way, is the only city in two dozen metro areas that Boustead examined that is not having an "extreme" or "severe" winter. It's merely average.

Boustead uses daily high and low temperatures and daily and accumulated snowfall to come up with a winter index that's equivalent to the way meteorologists categorize hurricanes and tornadoes. Officially, it is called the Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index.

"I personally would call this a misery index," said Boustead.

But to co-creator Steve Hilberg, the index measures "awesomeness."

"I embrace winter rather than hating it," said Hilberg, a meteorologist who works at the Midwest Regional Climate Center in Champaign, Ill.

New York, Milwaukee and Duluth are in the midst of their fourth harshest winters.

Also having top-10 harshest winters are Minneapolis-St. Paul in Minnesota; Louisville, Ky.; Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., and Cheyenne, Wyo.

The idea is to put winter in context. This winter seems unusually harsh because it has been a while since the late 1970s and early 1980s when severe winters were far more frequent. People have short memories.

Plus, for almost three-quarters of the places studied the winter of 2011-2012 was the mildest on record, Boustead said.

But why Detroit?

Just bad geography and luck. Much of the cold and snow this winter is because of a change in the jet stream that has funneled frigid air south from the Arctic "right down the alley" through Detroit, Hilberg said.

The winter index keeps going, until the cold, snowy weather stops. And that's at least a couple weeks away, according to forecasts.

"We're going to push that index a little bit higher," Boustead said. "Let's see how much higher we can go."

OT

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includes all nuts, including products that use or contain nuts. All classroom treats or snacks must have an ingredient label present.

As part of its education process, the school sent information home with its 260 students prior to the ban. In addition, the peanut-free policy is listed on the district's website.

Avon school officials learned last November of the student's upcoming enrollment and began taking action, Culver said. The school cooks no longer ordered peanut butter, preparing for its removal from the hot lunch program.

"We have some kids who don't drink milk. We have some students with issues with gluten. Our cooks have dealt with that," the superintendent said. "But this (peanut) situation was completely new to us. I have learned more in the last couple, three months than I had ever known about food allergies."

Culver contacted other schools, including Vermillion and Dakota Valley, to learn about their peanut-free poli-

cies. He used their experiences as a guide in crafting Avon's policy for board approval.

The Avon board passed the peanut ban at its December meeting, with Dr. Mel Wallinga of Bon Homme Family Practice on hand to answer allergy questions.

"The majority of (reactions) are mostly surface, like redness and maybe some puffiness of the face, maybe some hives," Wallinga told the *Press & Dakotan* this week. "But it can just come on very suddenly and cause people to have trouble breathing. It's very rare, but there have been some reports of dying."

Peanut residue can be transported by touch or through the air, Wallinga said. That's why it's crucial that all students and staff members wash their hands when handling peanuts or peanut products, even before they arrive at school, he said.

TAKING ACTION

When it came to implementing their peanut-free policy, Avon school officials made a truly clean start. School custodians spent Christmas break sanitizing the entire school complex to remove traces of peanuts.

"We have our pre-school program, and all those toys

had to be cleaned and sanitized. We had all the desks and buildings cleaned," Culver said. "It's something we routinely do over Christmas, with the janitors cleaning out the germs and bugs to eliminate sickness. Now, it's something that's even more important (with the peanut ban)."

The concessions stand also received an overhaul, Culver said. Peanut products were pulled from the menu, and the old popcorn machines — which used peanut oil — were replaced with a new one at about the same cost, he said.

In addition, the district placed restrictions on food brought onto school property, Culver said. "We don't allow homemade treats. If a kid has birthday treats, it still has to be in the (original) package with an ingredient label," he said.

Teachers and students are reminded to be vigilant about the peanut-free policy if they bring their lunches. Also, everyone is reminded to wash their hands before coming to the school, in case they ate peanut butter or other products at home, Culver said.

In addition, the custodians use specialized cleaning products as part of their daily routine. Parties who rent school property are re-

mindful of the peanut ban when it comes to allowable food items and the clean-up.

The peanut ban isn't limited to the school grounds, Culver said. Planning to eat on the way home from a game, the Avon girls basketball team checked whether the restaurant offered a peanut-free menu and facilities so as not to contaminate the school bus.

"The restaurant told us all the employees take a two-hour course on food allergies," the superintendent said. "Many places are already dealing with this. You don't realize until you get into (this situation) that you're not re-inventing the wheel."

Even with the best precautions, Avon school staff members are prepared for a student's allergic reaction, Culver said. EpiPens are located at three sites around the building. Staff members have received training in administering the injection, and practice pens are available as a refresher.

The allergic student's family furnished the EpiPens, and websites offer free EpiPens for schools, Culver said.

Response time is critical when using the EpiPens, Wallinga said. "It's like treating for a bee sting. The quicker you provide treat-

ment, the better the outcome usually is," he said.

PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE

When it comes to its peanut-free policy, Avon joins a list of schools that will likely grow in the future, Wallinga said.

"Peanut allergies affect 1 percent of the population. Some kids don't know they have a peanut reaction," he said. "Most children don't outgrow their allergies. The majority have them their entire lives."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, food allergies among U.S. children increased 50 percent between 1997 and 2011. In addition, an estimated 9 million adults and 6 million children in the U.S. have some type of food allergy.

According to one estimate, 1.5 million people in the U.S. have a peanut allergy, with peanut products responsible for about 160 deaths annually in the U.S.

Wallinga isn't sure if the number of cases has actually grown over the years, possibly because of increased use of peanut oil in processing, or if there's just greater attention to food allergies.

"There is definitely more public awareness," he said, recommending the website foodallergy.org.

The Avon school board

discussed the peanut ban at its February meeting and will tweak the policy, Culver said.

In general, the public has been understanding of the ban, Culver said.

"As a school board, our job is to have a safe place for the kids to come to school," he said. "We shovel the snow from the sidewalks, we install handrails, we make sure that our floors are dry. This (peanut ban) is just one more safety measure."

For the few who raise objections, Culver puts the ban in perspective.

"A lot of people need to realize the reason we are doing this isn't to make people's lives miserable or inconvenient. We're trying to protect a kid," he said.

"If somebody ever complains to me, the question I would ask is: What would you want us to do if it was your child or grandchild? It's part of our mission, and it's the right thing to do."

For information on Avon's peanut-free policy, visit online at www.avon.k12.sd.us.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.

Brazil

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Brito now works for a chemical company in Brazil and last fall, Thoenne began talking to him about a return visit. The 9.5-hour flight from Dallas to Sao Paulo, Brazil, did nothing to deter his determination but after arriving there, Thoenne sometimes felt like he had traveled to edge of civilization.

The language barrier was many times overwhelming, especially when Thoenne had an 18-hour layover in the Brazilian airport and only found two people who spoke English — the airline clerk who claimed his ticket and a little lady from Italy who immediately sat with him to visit after she saw him talking on his phone.

The first day of Thoenne's 10-day visit was spent celebrating a 25th wedding anniversary with his host family but from then on it was work. He traveled with Brito to farming areas in the rain forest where Brito worked with the large corporate farmers and saw the intensive, back-breaking labor needed to clear the rain forest which is completed all by manual labor.

The corporate farm which Thoenne visited was owned by German descendants who spoke German, English and Portuguese, the main language of the area. They have farmed their 36,000 acre family holding in this area since after the war when their grandfather moved to Brazil. They break up 900 acres every year which is an area 2 kilometers by 2 kilometers or 400 hectares in their neck of the woods. Needless to say, the machinery is very modern and big. Thoenne estimated 20 men worked on this farm in two shifts, 24 hours a day.

"The German farmers did speak English but if I spoke German, it was like the dam broke and they talked about everything," Thoenne said. The Thoenne family has had two German foreign exchange students and another from Denmark while in the exchange program. He has traveled to Germany but still has Denmark to see.

After clearing the trees from the forest, the process

then becomes simple. The first year out of the rain forest, rice is planted. The second year they plant soybeans and occasionally the farmers plant corn but generally, they plant soybeans year after year Thoenne said. Since it never freezes there, bugs and worms are their biggest enemies. Thoenne said he held a common worm in his hand and they are so aggressive, the bugs bite and draw blood. The farmers use BT soybean seed and spray ten times a year.

"When you would stand in a field of soybeans, it was like standing in an ocean of green, as far as the eye could see in any direction, there were soybeans," Thoenne said. Sometimes on the very edge you might see the rain forest still standing.

Just like the name of the area, Rain Forest, irrigation is not needed as the area has a rainy season from December to March so generally all planting is completed before the rainy season begins and usually harvested before it ends. Thoenne saw soybeans at all stages when he was there in December — even blooming plants. When the dry season starts, the area becomes like a desert with black sand. It can rain five inches in one day and the next day farmers are spraying again.

The roads were built by the farmers themselves so they can get their harvest to the market. They marked out 2 kilometers square throughout the area and built roads without any government assistance and they were rough Thoenne said. Ferries are used to cross rivers but interestingly cell phone service was good yet it was a normal occurrence for the electricity to go out every

evening. The wood is always saved when clearing the rain forest areas and used to heat their grain drying facilities like the 900,000 bushel grain storage unit he visited. Electricity is scarce and unreliable.

In the evenings, when the electricity went out, they would go to a café where they cooked with propane grills and ate by candlelight. Everyone was very friendly and the evening was filled with visiting. Thoenne said after the noon meal, they always took an hour to drink coffee and visit after they ate as well.

The shopping interested Thoenne also. Markets had about one-tenth of the items normally carried at a grocery store here but their fresh fruit and vegetable departments were amazing and huge. These areas were air-conditioned but homes were not. It was always at least 90 degrees there every day but the heat didn't bother Thoenne — he just got used to it.

The food was excellent and the meat typically served was mutton and pork. What beef Thoenne had was tough. It was one comment Brito made when he visited Fordyce, how tender the meat was compared to his home in Brazil.

Thoenne made it home in time to celebrate Christmas with his family but he left a little part of himself in Brazil. He even thinks about retiring to Brazil one day but he has responsibilities here to take care of first.

"The biggest thing I came home with is how easy going the culture is," Thoenne said. "Every night the electricity went out and no one got upset. They just said, oh well. Here, everyone would be crazy."

Land

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were down to 19 last year, while they were at 32 in 2012 and 40 in 2011.

The office also issued 1,636 birth certificates; 1,138 death certificates; 456 marriage certificates, 166 marriage licenses and 139 burial permits during 2013.

Of note is that the number of birth, death and marriage certificates issued do not reflect the actual number of births, deaths and marriages in Yankton County. Those documents are requested for a variety of reasons. For example, birth certificates may be needed for a newborn, school enrollment, a passport application or a driver's license.

With all that activity, the register of deeds collected an office record of \$300,738 in fees last year.

The money spent in 2013 by the office was \$196,843.

"(It) was the second consecutive year that the Yankton County Register of Deeds staff collected a fee total that exceeds the office's budget dollars spent by more than \$100,000," Hunhoff said.

According to Lori Mackey, director of the Yankton County Department of Equalization, there were 421 property transfers during 2013 that qualified as "good sales" that can be used in her office's annual ratio study.

"Sales that are eliminated from our study are those between family members, sales under duress (such as a sheriff's sale) and sales that are not on the open market," she told the Yankton County Commission recently when

sharing her annual report.

The overall ratio of assessments to sale price on non-agricultural properties dropped from 90.81 percent to 87.42 percent in 2013, which indicates that assessments are not keeping pace with rising sales.

"There are a number of factors that contribute to that," Mackey stated. "There were fewer houses on the market, and they were being bought up quicker and for higher prices. We also have favorable interest rates that may be driving that, as well."

Because the ratio is dropping, Mackey said the department is planning to raise the values on more than 60 percent of non-agricultural properties. Those figures are subject to approval from the South Dakota Department of Revenue.

"What we need to do is raise values in the appropriate areas to get at a good level of assessment," Mackey stated.

The proposed rates would return the ratio to 93.7 percent, which was the equalization factor in 2013.

Agricultural property has been valued using the productivity method since the 2010 assessment.

State law includes caps on increases, which can vary depending on how close the county's agricultural values are to the full agricultural income value.

According to the department of equalization annual report, the 2014 top dollar for crop land is \$2,858.57, an increase of 14.46 percent compared to the previous year. Grassland is \$1,746.96, which is up 1.43 percent.

Yankton County is one of a handful of counties in the state that are at full agricultural income value for crop-

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Wednesday, February 26
7:40 am YHS Topics
(Bret Johnson,
JJ Hejna, Ryan Olson)
8:20 am Hy-Vee Foods
(Chef Staci)
8:45 am Mount Marty
(Kristi Tacke)
Thursday, February 27
7:40 am Yankton
Conv/Vis Bureau
(Lisa Scheve)
8:20 am Yankton Chamber
(Carmen Schramm)