

Winter storm knocks out power across region

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Tens of thousands of Fredericksburg area residents were left without power after a winter storm Monday blanketed the region under almost a foot of ice and snow in some places.

Dominion reported more than 44,000 of the 53,310 homes and businesses it serves in Stafford County were without power as night fell Monday and temperatures began a precipitous drop into the teens overnight. In Spotsylvania County, 11,663 out of 33,603 Dominion customers were out of power as of 6 p.m. and in Fredericksburg, 4,035 customers out of nearly 15,000 were without power.

In a statement posted on its Facebook page, Dominion said falling trees and limbs were continuing to cause additional outages and creating hazardous working conditions for its crews. It warned customers in the Fredericksburg area and other hard-hit regions should prepare to be without power “for multiple days.”

“We will work around the clock to get your heat and lights back on as quickly as we can,” Dominion said in the post, adding that, “We will not stop until everyone is back on.”

Just under 3,000 of the 9,100 Dominion customers in King George did not have power at 6 p.m. and another

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Ed Whelan, the owner of the Inn at Olde Silk Mill, knocks snow off the awning of his business in Fredericksburg. The region received between seven and 11 inches of snow.

SNOW

► FROM A1

7,900 Northern Neck Electric Cooperative customers in King George, Stafford and Westmoreland counties were in the dark, according to an update from the cooperative.

“NNEC will be receiving 16 mutual aid crews from nine different co-ops,” according to the update. “The crews are on their way from Pennsylvania and will be working at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow, Jan. 4.”

The co-op noted that the King George Citizens Center was open as a shelter for those who did not have heat and residents could fill water containers at the King George fire station.

The storm is also heavily affecting NOVEC customers in Stafford, with 2,970 of 5,713 households out of power.

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative reported about 20,000 of the 26,543 homes, businesses and other customers it serves Spotsylvania County were without power at 6 p.m. In Caroline County, more than 10,000 of REC’s 13,075 customers were still in the dark. REC also said it would be several days before all power is restored, with efforts starting on larger outages.

Total snow accumulation Monday was estimated at 7 to 11 inches by the National Weather Service. The wet, heavy snow froze on trees and power lines, leading to the widespread outages.

The loss of power means many residents will be without heat as temperatures plunged overnight to a forecasted low of 18 degrees. The thermometer was expected to top out only in the high 30s Tuesday, with the more typical

winter temperatures likely to continue through the week.

Stafford, Spotsylvania, Caroline, King George and Fredericksburg Public Schools all announced that schools would be closed on Tuesday.

The ice and snow caused thousands of accidents and stranded vehicles throughout central and northern Virginia. As of 3:30 p.m. Monday, Virginia State Police had responded to more than 2,000 calls for service due to treacherous road conditions Monday. Numerous tractor-trailers and vehicles became stuck or disabled on I-95 near the Rappahannock River bridge, state police reported.

No injuries were reported, but state police urged people to avoid driving unless absolutely necessary, especially as evening and freezing temperatures

set in.

“Due to the heavy snowfall concentrated in that area, road conditions rapidly turned treacherous for commercial and passenger vehicles,” state police reported in a press release. “VSP troopers, wreckers, and VDOT crews continue to work as quickly as the weather and roads will safely permit to get stuck vehicles cleared and traffic moving again on I-95.”

AAA also warned motorists of dangerous road conditions overnight and the possibility of batteries breaking down due to freezing temperatures.

“At zero degrees, a car’s battery loses about 60 percent of its strength, yet the engine needs about twice as much power to start,” AAA stated in a press release.

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