



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
PAT QUINN

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## **Governor Quinn Thanks Emergency Crews and Personnel for Winter Storm Response**

*Heroic Rescue Stories Emerge; Thousands Worked  
Around the Clock to Keep Illinois Residents Safe During  
Winter Blast*

CHICAGO – Governor Pat Quinn today thanked the emergency workers who provided around-the-clock assistance during this week’s historic winter storm and freeze. Since last week, thousands of state employees worked tirelessly to clear Illinois roads, rescue stranded motorists and keep people safe. During the storm, many heroic rescue stories surfaced and the Governor thanked workers who made the state’s effective storm response possible.

“When disaster strikes the heartland, Illinois’ first responders are on the job to keep people safe,” Governor Quinn said. “Illinois is a community of shared values. I want to recognize and thank our response and emergency personnel who have been working day and night to assist those in need during this remarkable storm.”

“People across our state stepped up to help, from those driving the salt and plow trucks at all hours of the night to keep interstates safe to our neighbors who checked on their neighbors during extremely low temperatures,” the Governor said. “This was an amazing effort during an amazing winter storm.”

The Governor monitored weather conditions hour-by-hour and directed the state’s agencies to take a number of steps in response to the heavy snow and severe cold gripping Illinois. On Sunday, the Governor activated the State Emergency Operations Center in Springfield to coordinate the state’s response to the storm. Representatives from critical safety agencies staffed the center 24 hours a day throughout the duration of the storm and dangerously low temperatures. As a dangerous combination of black ice and snow drifts developed overnight, Governor Quinn issued a statewide disaster declaration, which activated the state’s emergency operations plan and allowed him to activate the Illinois National Guard to assist state and local emergency responders. As conditions continued to worsen, the Governor implemented the State’s Continuity of Operations/Continuity of Government Plans to ensure continued delivery of critical state response services during the severe winter weather conditions while protecting the state’s workforce.

Several state agencies were at the forefront of the state's storm response, and individual stories of heroism emerged during the days they protected and served the citizens of Illinois.

### **Department of Transportation**

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) had 1,755 trucks assigned to snow duty across the state, and nearly 3,700 full-time and part-time employees available to help ensure roads were clear and passable. Statewide, IDOT and Tollway crews dispersed more than of 70,000 tons of salt on Illinois roadways during the weather emergency.

IDOT cleared the way for an ambulance that was transporting a woman experiencing a difficult child birth in Stark County. The Stark County Sheriff's Department contacted IDOT and informed them that there was a woman having a difficult labor in Wyoming, Ill., and the ambulance needed a snowplow to try to escort them to the hospital in Kewanee. The IDOT snow shift foreman from the Stark County maintenance yard in Wyoming informed responders that the best route for the ambulance would be to take Route 17 to Route 78, arriving at the hospital in Kewanee. IDOT Districts 2 and 4 then worked to get the needed snow plows to the area so the ambulance would have a clear path. The baby boy, Subal Patel – 6 pounds 7 ounces and 22 inches long – arrived shortly after the ambulance reached the hospital in Kewanee. Mother Parul Patel, proud father Chad Patel, and little Subal are all doing fine.

### **Tollway**

The Illinois Tollway deployed its full fleet of 182 snowplows and called in more than 400 employees to keep its 286 miles of roadway clear. The Tollway deployed 11 H.E.L.P. trucks and 22 Zero Weather Road Patrols operating around the clock during the extreme cold that followed the snowfall. Tollway employees and Illinois State Police District 15 provided emergency assistance to 1,099 customers across the system. The \*999 Cellular Express Line System handled 1,869 calls from customers during the snowstorm and extreme freeze.

In addition to salt, the Tollway used 1,293 tons of roadway abrasives and sprayed 1,900 gallons of liquid Calcium Chloride. There were 275 accidents reported on the Tollway system during the severe weather. At the storm's peak, the Central Dispatch Center was handling more than 75 incidents simultaneously involving both Illinois State Police District 15 and Tollway maintenance crews.

Ed Robinson, a Tollway H.E.L.P. truck operator on the Tri-State Tollway in Lake County stopped Tuesday night to help two customers whose car broke down as they were driving to O'Hare Airport, leaving them without heat in the extreme cold. After arranging to have the vehicle towed to an auto repair shop, they learned the car could not be repaired that night because the shop was busy and getting ready to close, leaving them stranded. After learning about the new trouble, Robinson met the couple on his own time after his shift ended and installed an alternator in the car so they could complete their trip to O'Hare safely. Afterward, he told his supervisor that he wanted to help the couple and ensure their safety, and hoped that someone would do the same for his kids.

### **State Police**

Statewide, from Sunday to Tuesday, the Illinois State Police responded to more than 6,000 thousands of incidents including 3,932 motorist assists, 792 crashes and 534 traffic stops. All available personnel, including SWAT team members and Crime Scene Services, worked to make the roads safer and respond to emergencies.

The ISP organized a multi-agency "Rescue Task Force" in Livingston County late Sunday night when several motorists became stranded on Route 116 and road conditions prevented emergency responders from reaching them. At about 10 p.m. Cecilia Zroegaert and Steven Zroegaert became stuck in a ditch three miles west of Saunemin. Several other motorists were also stuck on Route 116 due to heavy snow and white-out conditions. State Police District 6 was notified of the stranded motorists and quickly deployed the "Rescue Task Force" that included two Department of Transportation snow plows, two tow trucks, and a State Police SWAT operator driving a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Starting from Pontiac and led by a District 6 Sergeant in a patrol car, the task force had to clear more than nine miles of Route 116 in order to reach the stranded motorists.

Temperatures continued to drop and progress was slow as the rescue team encountered large snow drifts rapidly accumulating from the high winds. At about 11 p.m. the rescue team reached a section of highway covered by snow drifts more than six feet tall that prevented the plows and emergency equipment from moving any further. The Saunemin Fire Department's attempt to rescue the motorists from the opposite direction on Route 116 was blocked by abandoned vehicles left on the highway.

State Police Sergeant Tim Sweeney and Trooper David Diller worked diligently to find a local resource to assist. About 11:30 p.m. they located a citizen from Saunemin, Matthew Harms, who set out to rescue the motorists using his snowmobile. By this time the Zroegaerts' vehicle was low on fuel and no longer able to provide heat; the rescuers told the Zroegaerts by cell phone to honk their horn every few minutes to help Harms locate them. Harms finally located the Zroegaerts shortly after midnight and drove them to safety. Harms then checked every stranded vehicle in the area to ensure no others needed assistance.

The rescue task force was finally able to clear Route 116 to Saunemin at about 1:30 a.m. Monday.

### **Department of Natural Resources**

A total of 58 Conservation Police Officers from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) equipped with four-wheel-drive vehicles and eight snowmobiles, performed 500 public assists, including motorist assistance, welfare checks and relays during the winter weather emergency.

Conservation Police Officer Robert Wellum carried a five gallon can of gasoline on foot nearly one mile in 20 degrees below zero wind chills to a family in Clark County whose emergency generator had run out of fuel. On Monday, Jan. 6 at 11 a.m. a 911 call was made by a family of four, including two small children, stranded in their home in rural Clark County. They had run out of gas to power their generator and the home was without power and heat. Officer Wellum went to nearby gas station to fill up a five gallon gas can using his own money, then drove as close as possible to the home, but snow drifts had made roads impassable. Wellum got out of his truck and walked one mile to the family's home while carrying the can of gas, and he arrived just in time – the temperature in the home was at 52 degrees and rapidly dropping.

Conservation Police Officer Trent Reeves rescued seven people and two pets that were trapped by snow drifts along Route 47 north of Mahomet. Emergency vehicles could not reach the people, so Officer Reeves traveled by snowmobile and on foot to rescue the stranded individuals and deliver them to nearby emergency vehicles. All of those rescued, including the pets, are fine. Officer Jim Mayes assisted with the rescue, and himself used his truck to rescue six individuals who were stranded on Interstate 74 in east central Illinois.

## **National Guard**

More than 30 Illinois Army National Guard mechanics were activated to support the winter storm efforts by assisting IDOT with truck repair and maintenance of winter storm equipment degraded by the events over the last week. On Jan. 6 Governor Quinn activated two soldiers and a heavy-duty military wrecker to help IDOT and State Police pull three civilian vehicles and five semi tractor-trailers out of the snow and line of traffic.

Personnel from the Illinois National Guard field maintenance shop in Mattoon coordinated with Illinois State Police troopers and Illinois Department of Transportation snow plow crews to assist motorists in approximately 375 vehicles backed up on I-70 and I-57 north of Effingham Sunday evening. The backup was the result of several vehicles and semi-trucks that were stuck in snow drifts, making it impossible for snow plows to clear the route for the cars to proceed. Illinois National Guard personnel used a wrecker to pull the stranded vehicles and trucks from the road, which allowed IDOT crews to clear the road and rescue hundreds of passengers.

National Guard soldiers were also on hand to ensure that IDOT vehicles were fully operational and capable of handling the intense cold and snow which could affect all vehicles on Illinois roads.

"The snow storm and extreme temperatures has an effect on vehicles and personnel, and the man-power we have is not able to keep up with repairs," James McKay, an engineer technician with IDOT Emergency Traffic Patrol (ETP) in Chicago, said of conditions before the National Guard arrived. "With the over whelming amount or repairs our maintenance division has right now, help is definitely needed. You are coming to our rescue, you're putting our fleet back into operating condition, and we are very thankful."

"The Soldiers are great. They showed up early, had their A-game on, and were ready to work," Joseph Lonero, an equipment expeditor with IDOT ETP in Chicago, said. "We have over 100 vehicles district wide that need repairs, we will keep them busy and we are thankful for the help."

## **Department of Human Services**

During the storm, the Governor opened and encouraged residents to find shelter in the state's more than 100 warming centers, including Illinois Department of Human Services offices throughout the state, and the seven Illinois Tollway Oases. Hundreds of individuals took advantage of the warming centers over the course of the storm.

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