

RI Gov. McKee updates blizzard situation: 9:30am press conference



Gov. Daniel McKee and Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos at the RI Emergency Management Agency with his team responding to the blizzard from Department of Transportation, National Grid, State Police, National Guard, Jan 29, 2022, 9:30am.

(Photo: Michael Bilow)

(Click here to watch the full press conference.)

After declaring a state of emergency and imposing a travel ban because of the blizzard affecting RI today, Gov. Daniel McKee gave a progress report at a press conference held at the Emergency Management Agency (EMA) in Cranston this morning at 9:30am. He was accompanied by Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos along with leadership from the EMA, Department of Transportation, National Grid, State Police, and National Guard.

“As we expected, the storm started accumulating overnight and the winds have picked up. We are now seeing significant snowfall and rapid accumulation. We are experiencing snowfall between one and three inches an hour, totally between 18 and 24 inches by the time this is all said and done. And as I mentioned yesterday, this is one of the top snowfalls in a 24-hour period in the history of the State of Rhode Island at this point in time. That’s what we expect and that’s what we’re getting,” McKee said. “We expect the heaviest snows to be between 10am and 4pm today. That’s why the best thing that we can do right now is stay off the roads. Stay home right in the comfort of your own home. Between 11pm last night and 2am This morning, the Rhode Island State Police responded to 15 weather related accidents. Since then conditions have only getting worse. Don’t put yourself in harm’s way, and again don’t put the people – all the first-responders out there, all our traffic plowers, you know people are

behind the plows – don't put them in harm's way. So stay off the roads, please. Let us let our plows do their job and then we open things up and we're in good shape as we recover tomorrow."

McKee said all bridges are closed except for emergency vehicles, including the Newport Bridge, the Jamestown Bridge, and the Sakonnet River Bridge. McKee said that many parking bans have been imposed, and this is a matter of safety for access by fire and rescue. Have devices, including flashlights, charged, McKee said, although only about 75 households so far have experienced power loss from the storm.

Update: At 12:30pm, the governor told *Motif* that due to limited safety and visibility, state police have been directed to cease patrolling roads and maintain positions in case they need to be called out to respond. He said he has not been able to leave the EMA facility to see for himself due to weather conditions, and his press spokesman said that would likely have to wait until tomorrow.

Requests have been forwarded to President Joe Biden for a federal disaster declaration to provide resources to help the state, McKee said, and the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had offered assistance.

"I want to say thank you to everyone who is on the job doing the work making sure Rhode Islanders are safe: our plow crews, DPW workers, police officers, firefighters, first-responders and healthcare workers. Thank you on behalf of the people of the state of Rhode Island. This is a team effort, and because of the great team we have, we'll get through this. If you have an opportunity, help your neighbor if you can. Make sure that you're careful and we will see good results because of the great work that is happening in the local communities and on the state level," McKee said.

Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos address the public in Spanish summarizing much of what McKee had said immediately before, adding "Just a reminder about the United Way, 211 is the number that you can call, if you need shelter or food. They have volunteers available answering the phone 24x7, so make sure you reach out to the United Way if you need assistance."

State Police Superintendent Col. James Manni said, "As I stated yesterday, we do not put the travel bans in effect lightly. We realize that it creates some hardship for some people. But I'm happy to report that the vast majority of Rhode Islanders are staying off the highways. I drove most parts of the state today and I only saw a handful of vehicles. We do make exceptions, if you're essential personnel and you must be at a hospital, nursing home, doctor, people that are involved in plow operations. We make those exceptions, but the the highways are fairly light. We have not issued a summons at this point."

Department of Transportation Director Peter Alviti said, "The reports that we're getting in and my own observation out on the road is that everything is going exactly according to plan. We told you yesterday, we would have a full complement... about 155 of our plows and about 350 private vendors out there. They were deployed last night as we planned, they stayed out all night last night pre-treating the roads. At this point [9:30am] we've got what we expected, about four to seven inches across the state... As we said yesterday, the intensities which you can see is now picking up along with the wind gusts is going to create challenges for them... The general public is cooperating and so are the trucking industry: there are literally no tractor trailers on our highways and very few vehicles that I passed I when I was on the road this morning... Things are about to get a lot worse out there. So if you've stayed off the road, up until now, we certainly thank you for that. The next few hours are crucial. It's going to be dangerous out there. There's going to be very low visibility. There are whiteout conditions happening out there right now... Our folks are doing what they do, they're going to punch through the other side of this. We told

you yesterday our plan, that plan is in full effect and it's working, so we're going to stay with it."