Kodiak Tries to Dig Out

Tuesday, 24 March 2009

Jay Barrett/KMXT

Much of Kodiak is essentially shut down today after one of the biggest winter storms on record hit the island. A foot of snow has fallen since midnight, according to the National Weather Service in Kodiak, with 20 inches total since early Monday. The all-time total for this date is 17-point-8 inches in 1956.

The State Department of Transportation reported an avalanche blocking the Chiniak Highway just past the Coast Guard Base. One lane was opened by 7:30, and it was cleared a couple hours later.

Deputy Harbormaster Lon White said one small boat sank at Saint Paul Harbor because of the snow load, and several others are in peril of going under as well. He urged boat owners to check their vessels as soon as they can. The snow was so bad during the height of the storm overnight that White said it was impossible for the four-by-four harbor trucks to make it to Saint Herman Harbor on Near Island. He said the harbor crew is “digging out, like everyone else,” today.

Airport operations have been suspended, and crews were still plowing the runway at noon. A spokesperson at Era Aviation said they expect that to be done by 2 p.m.

School in Kodiak was canceled. Parents got the word from an automated phone message sent to them at 11 o’clock last night.

Kodiak Police Chief T.C. Kamai said his department has not seen many accidents, but has mostly been dealing with vehicles stuck on or beside the roadways. He said even a couple of his department’s Ford Expedition SUVs got stuck, something he said he never thought he’d see happen.

As for road conditions, the chief says they are marginal. He said they are drivable, but slippery. Roads in the city’s residential areas are narrow to begin with, and with snow removal crews plowing, they’re even harder to navigate. He recommends people stay home if they absolutely don’t need to go out.

Debra Marlar, the city clerk, e-mailed saying the city offices were closed and that tonight’s council work session has been rescheduled for Thursday at 6 p.m. The city is operating on a skeleton crew. The Kodiak Island Borough offices are closed, as well.

Also closed: the city’s A. Holmes Johnson Public Library, the Saint Paul Preschool Daycare, Kodiak Christian School, the Kodiak Baptist Mission school programs, the KANA offices, as well as the WIC and Infant Learning programs, State Job Service Center, Kodiak Island Housing Authority, Kodiak College and the Kodiak Senior Citizens’ Center. The senior center will not be making home delivery of meals, and its Island Cove is closed as well. The Community Health Center at Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center is closed, and specialty clinics have been cancelled. The emergency room is open.

But it’s not just offices and schools that have been shut down due to the storm. Many residents find themselves trapped at home by the snow, which was whipped into five- six- or even seven-foot drifts in some places, making driveways impassible. Commercial snowplow drivers are being stretched thin, and some are reportedly assisting the city and borough.

White’s advice to those who absolutely don’t need to leave their homes: Hunker down and enjoy the weather. The forecast is calling for five more inches of snow today and tonight, with mixed rain and snow Wednesday.