

Snow Catches Motorists Off Guard Sunday Evening



Snow came sooner than predicted Sunday afternoon and caused numerous problems for motorists on Wilkes County roads Sunday evening.

The Wilkesboros received less than 2 inches of snow and 2-3 inches accumulated outside the Wilkesboros, with temperatures in the upper teens. Sleet and freezing rain fell Monday morning and most roads still had a coating of snow and ice.

The National Weather Service announced that a winter storm warning remains in effect in Wilkes and some other area counties through noon Tuesday, with 1-3 more inches of snow and 1-2 inches of ice from sleet and freezing rain expected.

Temperatures were in the low to mid-20s during the daylight hours Monday morning but were expected to rise into the low to mid-30s by late Monday. Lows in the low to mid-30s are expected Monday night and Tuesday morning. Local law enforcement officials said the snow Sunday apparently caught many motorists by surprise. They said few problems were reported Monday morning due to people waiting before driving anywhere.

"I think it's still treacherous," said North Wilkesboro Police Chief Joe Rankin about conditions Monday morning. Rankin recommended that people stay off roads unless necessary. He said anyone driving should be in all-wheel drive or four-wheel drive vehicles.

The worst situations Sunday were in North Wilkesboro starting around 5:30 p.m., where numerous vehicles without four-wheel drive or all-wheel drive couldn't make it up hills or slid off roads.

There were about six actual wrecks with damage in North Wilkesboro Sunday evening but no serious injuries. Rankin said Second Street Hill and N.C. 115 near Ted's Kickin' Chicken were the biggest problem areas, with cars sliding off the road and in some cases into one another due to ice and snow.

About 6:45 p.m. Sunday, a North Wilkesboro police officer reported that as many as a dozen cars were stuck and unable to climb Second Street Hill because Second Street "was a solid sheet of ice."

North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Jimmy Martin said Second Street was briefly blocked at the bottom and top with North Wilkesboro fire trucks. Southbound lanes of Second Street were reopened to traffic shortly after 8 p.m. and northbound lanes were opened later.

Both lanes of N.C. 115 near Ted's Kickin' Chicken were blocked Sunday evening but reopened around 8 p.m., Rankin said.

He said Fifth, Sixth and Eighth streets also had "a lot of blockage, because cars couldn't make it up the hill." There also were problems on 10th Street.

There were a few minor wrecks and several vehicles also slid off roads in Wilkesboro Sunday evening.

There were reports of numerous vehicles sliding off roads outside the Wilkesboros, including on N.C. 115 on the hill just south of Hunting Creek in southeastern Wilkes and on N.C.268 East and on Red, White and Blue Road in the Roaring River area.

The Wilkes Communications Center reported dispatching N.C. Highway Patrol troopers to at least a dozen wrecks outside the Wilkesboros on Sunday.

Students in Wilkes were already out of school Monday due to President's Day. Classes at the Wilkes, Ashe and Alleghany county campuses of Wilkes Community College classes were cancelled Monday.