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UNH Climatologist Available To Discuss One-Year Anniversary Of Ice Storm

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DURHAM, N.H. – Mary Stampone, assistant professor of geography at the University of New Hampshire, and New Hampshire State Climatologist, is available to discuss the ice storm of 2008, which hit Dec. 11, 2008.

The devastating storm, which blanketed communities from Pennsylvania to Maine, left hundreds of thousands of Granite Staters without power for up to two weeks and pushed storm costs into the millions. New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch declared a state of emergency.

“These types of storms are common late fall into winter, and the mid-Atlantic region will get these mixed precipitation events throughout the winter. This one was particularly bad because it stalled, and most of the precipitation fell overnight when it was colder. New England and southeastern Canada usually experience a regionwide ice event like the one last year about every 10 years or so, and ice storms can affect smaller areas more frequently,” Stampone said.

According to Stampone, on Dec. 11, 2008, a low-pressure system centered over the southeastern United States moved northeast along the east coast, stalling and strengthening along the southern coast of New England. Winds ahead of the storm brought cold air down from the north, resulting in air temperatures that hovered around freezing throughout the day and night and cooling surfaces to or just below freezing. As the storm approached New England, a warm front developed parallel to the coast drawing in above freezing, humid air from the south. As the storm passed over the New England area overnight, much of New Hampshire remained in this transitional area of the storm.

Along the warm front, warmer air from the south moved up and over the colder, near freezing air along the surface. This created a wedge of colder air between the surface and the warmer air moving toward the north at upper levels. Liquid precipitation falling through the above freezing layer of air a loft, cooled to the freezing point as it moved through the colder layer of air near at the surface. Over much of southern and central New Hampshire, the precipitation remained liquid but froze upon contact with subfreezing surfaces, coating these surfaces with a layer of ice that began accumulating shortly after dark and through the nighttime hours. In areas further inland and north, where temperatures were below freezing, the precipitation changed over to sleet or snow.

Freezing rain continued in southern areas of the state as the storm moved out of the area during the morning hours of Dec. 12. Many New Hampshire residents awoke to ice-covered surfaces, downed trees, and power outages. The storm moved out of the region by afternoon, allowing for sunny skies and temperatures in the mid to upper 30s statewide during the day on Dec. 12.
The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.