



GROUNDED

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Blizzard closes roads, strands hundreds

"It's just stunning. Some of the main roads look like a cow path behind an apple tree."

Michael Dougherty
MnDOT



Members of the Minnesota National Guard were deployed this past weekend to assist with rescue efforts of stranded motorists throughout Steele County. They utilized a small utility vehicle with tracks to rescue people grounded by the blizzard. Sheriff Lon Thiele, far right, is shown with the guard members. "They were a great group of National Guard personnel to work with," Thiele said.



COURTESY MNDOT

This is Interstate 35 between Ellendale and Hope Sunday night where it would normally be two lanes in each direction. However, after this weekend's blizzard, the roadway was down to a narrow path with huge banks on each side. Snow drifts of five or more feet were reported in many areas of Steele County. This was taken by a plow operator trying with little luck to open the interstate, which remained closed much of Monday.



COURTESY MNDOT

MnDOT workers had their hands full trying to clear off highways throughout southeastern Minnesota this past weekend after a blizzard dumped a foot of snow. In this photo, MnDOT was working to clear away I-90 by Dexter so the highway could be opened up again.

BLIZZARD BY THE NUMBERS

- 12 Inches of snow
- 50 Mph winds
- 1 State of Emergency declared
- 187 Stranded motorists at armory
- 50 Stranded motorists at Trinity Church
- 0 Injuries or fatalities

218 from Owatonna to Austin was also closed. In addition, MnDOT issued a no travel advisory on many highways throughout southeastern Minnesota for most of the weekend into Monday.

"It's just stunning," said Michael Dougherty, spokesperson for MnDOT. "Some of the main roads look like a cow path behind an apple tree. It seems strange to think someone would get stuck in the middle of the highway."

Of those vehicles that became stuck in the roadway, Dougherty said the motorists were rescued, but their vehicles could not be moved and remained right where they were left.

Contributing to the problem was that once motorists realized the interstate was closed, they got off and tried to use the county roads, according to Thiele. "They found themselves in worse conditions on the county roads," he said.

Highways were strewn with cars facing various directions and nowhere to go.

Dougherty said southeastern Minnesota was blasted with a trifecta of things to hit. First, heavy amounts of snow fell at rapid rates with up to a foot. Next came the heavy winds that created snow drifts as high as vehicles followed by plunging temperatures Sunday night into Monday.

"It all combines to make challenging conditions," Dougherty said. "We just don't see snow events like this."

Salt used to treat the roadways becomes ineffective when temperatures dip under 15 degrees, according to Dougherty. He said MnDOT was bringing in trucks from the Twin Cities metro area equipped with chemicals mixed with beet juice to help clear the roadways.

MnDOT also deployed big mounted snow blowers, known as SnoGos, which are mounted on the front of snow plows, from the metro area because the regular plows are unable to handle the drifts, Dougherty said.

"They just started carving into

SEE GROUNDED, A6

Even local residents become stranded by blizzard

BY ALEX MALM
STAFF WRITER

When Medford resident, Timothy Summer, finished his 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. shift on Sunday morning, in Faribault, he knew it would be a difficult journey.

What he didn't know, however, is that he would find himself stranded in a local Kwik Trip parking lot.

Summer explained that he when he left the city plows were out, and streets were clear.

Because he lives in Medford, he took I-35 south to Medford exit, and found that only one side of the roundabout was plowed at that time.

After making it into the Kwik Trip parking lot, which was some-

what plowed, he was able to fill up his tank.

At that point, Summer realized he would be stranded in the parking lot, for a while.

"This is the **worst storm I have ever experienced** in my 50 years of Minnesota winters."

Timothy Summer
Local stranded driver

"I could see there was no way I was going to be able to travel back to Medford or get back on 35 south or north bound," Summer explained.

For Summer, he never had been stranded like he was on Sunday.

"This is the worst storm I have ever experienced in my 50 years of Minnesota winters. It will take many big tow companies just to pull out the Semis stuck in and around parking lot," Summer said.

Although he was stranded for many hours in a parking lot, he was able to still stay positive.

"The plus side to this is I am safe, I can walk into store purchase food for me and my dog Sheldon," Summer said.

Summer was eventually able to get out of the parking lot, to make his way home at about 5:45 p.m., after being stranded for nearly nine hours.



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