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NEWS

Hurricane Irene: Quebec Slammed By Strong Winds, Thousands Without Power As Storm Moves Into Maritimes

CP

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MONTREAL - One person was unaccounted for and tens of thousands were in the dark Monday after the residual power of hurricane Irene cut a destructive path through Quebec and the Maritimes.

The post-tropical storm may be to blame for a road collapse Monday about 100 kilometres northeast of Montreal, where the resulting crevasse swallowed two cars and left authorities searching for a missing driver.

After smacking southern Quebec on Sunday with heavy rain and howling winds, a system that was once hurricane Irene churned northeast Monday across the province and into Atlantic Canada.

But Canada appeared to emerge relatively unscathed from the remnants of the powerful hurricane that killed at least 35 people in 10 U.S. states. It left millions of Americans without power and thousands of flights were cancelled.

Irene's post-tropical version, however, still packed a punch after it whipped north across the U.S. border Sunday and into Canada —where it flooded roads, snapped trees and knocked down power lines.

In Quebec, provincial police will resume their search Tuesday for a motorist who disappeared after a landslide sent a chunk of roadway—that had been pummelled by the storm — tumbling into the Yamaska River.

Police spokesman Benoit Richard said the driver of one vehicle scrambled to safety, as did one of the two occupants of the second car.

"The passenger managed to get out of the vehicle, but not the driver," Richard said, adding that police asked the Canadian Coast Guard for help in the search.

Quebec police also looked for another missing person after the storm: an 81-year-old man who disappeared Sunday after leaving his cottage, on foot, near Shawinigan.

Police said a resident found a man fitting his description in critical condition on Monday about two kilometres from the cabin. Spokesman Louis-Philippe Ruel, who could not immediately confirm the victim's identity, said the man was taken to hospital.

Environment Canada said the strongest winds were felt east of Quebec City on Ile d'Orleans, where gusts of 113 kilometres an hour were reported.

On Sunday, around 250,000 Hydro-Quebec customers had lost power, but the utility said it had restored all but 80,000 of them by late Monday afternoon.

"The hurricane hit much harder in Quebec than we had initially expected," said utility spokesman Louis-Olivier Batty.

"So, for sure, the workload is considerable."

The pounding rain also inundated neighbourhoods in Quebec, where public security officials said Monday that around 350 people had been forced from their homes and had yet to return.

What was left of hurricane Irene may have lost some steam as it veered into Eastern Canada, but it still had enough bite to inflict damage across the region.

It brought strong winds, gusting near 90 km/h, to parts of southern New Brunswick, northern and mainland Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, downing trees in some areas and knocking out power.

The wind also prompted authorities to restrict certain vehicle classes Monday from crossing the Confederation Bridge, which links New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Flights were cancelled at the airport in Moncton, N.B., while delays were reported at Halifax Stanfield International Airport.

Environment Canada said six-metre waves were reported over western Maritime waters.

New Brunswick's power utility reported Monday that 30,000 customers did not have electricity, but provincial public safety officials stressed that despite the widespread outages, they got off relatively easy.

"People took this storm seriously," said Public Safety Minister Robert Trevors. "Let's not be complacent with the next one."

Trevors warned while there is no major clean-up, motorists need to be cautious because tree limbs and other debris may still be on the roads.

Federal public Public Safety Minister Vic Toews praised emergency workers, governments and citizens for their responses to the storm.

"I would like to commend the residents of Quebec and Atlantic Canada for their resilience during tropical storm Irene, and applaud them for their preparedness in facing the first hurricane threat of the season," Toews said in a statement Monday.

Environment Canada said 107 millimetres of rain had already been dumped on Sherbrooke, Que. In New Brunswick, the soggiest community was Doaktown, which reported 89 millimetres of rain.

Parts of Labrador were expected to receive between 20 and 40 millimetres of rain as Irene tracked northeast.

- With files from Melanie Patten in Halifax and Kevin Bissett in Fredericton

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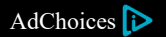
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