

Drivers Cautioned as Moscow Digs Out of First Snow

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Despite the snow, road conditions in Moscow have not been badly affected. **Filonov**

Moscow dug out of its first blanket of winter snow Wednesday with no major disruptions in road traffic or airport flights, officials said.

Still, inexperienced drivers and drivers who have not changed their summer tires for winter were urged to stay away from their cars for the next few days as the city braced for more snow and cold weather.

"We recommend that drivers who have not had time to change their tires use public transportation," a traffic police spokesman told Interfax. "Also, this advice applies to beginning drivers who, unfortunately, are often involved in accidents when the season changes because they do not yet have the necessary driving skills."

Police also said drivers should pay extra attention to their health, which can be ill-affected

by sudden changes in weather.

The first major snowfall of the season struck Moscow on Tuesday and continued overnight, leaving streets covered with up to 5 centimeters of white fluff and a thin layer of ice in some locations.

City Hall dispatched 9,000 snowplows, deicing vehicles and other equipment to clear the streets and sidewalks overnight, Interfax reported.

Hot water, electricity and other utilities were unaffected throughout the capital, while Moscow's three airports — Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo and Vnukovo — also were operating normally, it said.

But some residents in other parts of the Central Federal District, the central Russian territory that includes Moscow, did not fare as well. More than 23,000 people, including 4,000 children, remained without electricity in 900 towns on Wednesday after heavy snow cut supplies in the Tver, Kostroma and Yaroslavl regions, emergency officials said.

The weather also cut power to several towns in the Smolensk and Moscow regions, but the lights were restored by morning.

In a sharp change of weather, Moscow's temperature, which peaked at 5 degrees Celsius on Monday, plunged to minus 1 C Tuesday and was headed down to a forecasted minus 5 C on Wednesday night. Another centimeter of snow was expected to fall Wednesday, with intermittent flurries blowing through the city for at least the next four days.

The temperature, however, should warm up to zero to 2 C on Thursday and stay around there through the weekend.

Roman Vilfand, director of the federal weather bureau, warned this week that subfreezing temperatures lasting 36 hours or more could spell disaster on the roads. But none of those fears of dangerous icy conditions had materialized as of Wednesday, with the traffic police reporting no usual traffic jams or increase in accidents in Moscow or the surrounding regions.

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