

Flood reports stream in across the Valley Snowmelt, wet weather has officials on lookout

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Area public works bosses were busy dealing with street floods Wednesday and warily eyeing weather reports indicating more rain - in voluminous quantities - is on the way. And given the amount of snow the winter has dropped, they're also worried about the flooding potential when the spring melt comes.

'Flooding is pretty fast when it happens,' said Michael Klimoski, highway and water superintendent of Hadley, where rain water reached 8 to 10 inches deep on East Street Wednesday. 'The drainage system was just overwhelmed.'

Wednesday's rainfall may have long-term effects.

'The next two to three weeks are going to be fairly critical,' said Alan Dunham, of the National Weather Service in Taunton. 'We've been in a fairly wet pattern for a couple of months now.'

Rain that fell Tuesday and Wednesday caused flooding on at least eight streets in South Hadley, Hadley, Northampton and Easthampton as well as adding moisture to the existing snow pack, and the way in which that melts will contribute to the likelihood of more flooding as spring approaches.

'We have to evaluate it every single day,' Dunham said.

If temperatures are above freezing during the day and freezing at night, the snow will melt in an 'orderly' way; but if the nights and days are warm, there could be rapid melting and a 'whole lot of water,' Dunham said.

'This kind of snow pack does cause some concern but we just have to see how this whole thing unfolds,' Dunham said.

Klimoski said there will be flooding concern due to snow melt up north, especially in Vermont.

Sunny skies and temperature highs in the upper 30s and low 40s are expected today, but weather forecasters say more wet weather is expected to move in Friday afternoon, lasting well into Saturday, according to Dunham.

Friday's storm, which is coming from the Gulf of Mexico area, is expected to cause snow in western Massachusetts if it moves east of the region. However, if the storm move west

of the region, rain will be in the forecast, according to the National Weather Service. 'It's too early to tell,' Dunham said Wednesday morning.

Floods in the Valley

Officials in Hadley closed two roadways in that town - East Street and Newton Lane - Wednesday because of clogged drainage systems.

'The drainage system could not handle the flow of water,' Klimoski said. 'That's the case with many areas.'

Bay Road, Honey Pot Road and Aqua Vitae Road were also flooded Wednesday morning, Klimoski said. Hadley's Department of Public Works continued to check out the pipes and monitor the rainfall after it stopped raining Wednesday morning.

'We've been at it,' Klimoski said Wednesday. 'We'll probably be at it most of the day.'

No roads were reported closed because of flooding Wednesday in South Hadley, Northampton or Easthampton, although many low-lying roads were covered with huge puddles.

'We haven't taken any actions for this storm,' said Northampton's Public Works Director Ned Huntley.

'Usually we start work when the river gets a certain elevation much higher than it currently is.'

Northampton opens its flood-watch station when the level is 106, though its actual flood level is about 108, according to John Carver who works in Northampton's Waste Water Treatment Plant. He noted that Wednesday's water-level reading of 105-feet did not reach flood level status.

'We've had storms that have given us close to 2 1/2 inches or even higher in a course of a three-day period,' said Carver. This time around, (Tuesday night in to Wednesday morning) the city received 1.8 inches of rain.

'But this was heavy,' he noted, given 'the short period it came down.'

Other area communities logged similar rainfall amounts: between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, South Hadley had 1.6 inches of rain water, while, like Northampton, Easthampton measured about 1.8 inches, according to their waste water treatment plants.

Catch-basin blockages were cleared Wednesday on Silver Street in South Hadley and Damon Road in Northampton.

Meanwhile, city and town officials advise drivers to be wary of driving fast through flooded areas, which may cause their vehicles to stall.

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