Historic October Snowstorm Will Go Down in Record Books Across Storm-Weary Southern New England

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AMHERST, Mass. - Snowfall from the past weekend’s strong Nor’easter will likely go down in the record books as an historic event from the perspective of the long-term climate record, says climatologist Michael Rawlins, manager of the Climate System Research Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. And, depending on location, many new records will have been established for an individual day, for any day in October and for total snowfall in the month of October.

Overall, last month was wetter than average across much of central and southern New England, and precipitation from the past weekend’s storm adds to an already impressive year-to-date total. When January through September 2011 precipitation (liquid equivalent) amounts are combined, it was the wettest period on record in the Northeast, adds Rawlins, an assistant professor of geosciences at UMass Amherst.

The data are considered preliminary until quality-control checks are completed by the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., he adds.

The past weekend’s storm produced snowfalls of nearly three feet in parts of interior New England. A weather service observer in Jaffrey, N.H. reported the storm’s highest unofficial total of 31.4 inches and the western Massachusetts hill town of Plainfield recorded a 30.8 inch total. While heavy snowfall in October is rare, the region’s long-term climate records show at least a trace of snow having fallen in 30 to 40 percent of the Octobers for which records are available.

Locally, the National Weather Service forecast office at Bradley International airport near Hartford reported 12.3 inches of snow last Saturday and 8.0 inches on Sunday, establishing likely new records for both days. The previous record for daily snowfall was 1.7 inches set in a major regional snowstorm on Oct. 10, 1979, when many other regional records were set. This year’s October total of 20.3 inches will far eclipse the previous monthly record set during the 1979 storm. Hartford has experienced at least a trace of snow in October during 30 of the past 100 years.

Worcester's Saturday snowfall of 11.4 inches surpasses the previous October single-day record of 7.5 inches, also established on Oct. 10, 1979. Further, the 3.2 inches that fell last Sunday will probably set a record for the date, the climate researcher notes. The October 2011 total of 16.0 inches, which includes the 1.4 inches on the 27th, is also a likely new record. Worcester has recorded a trace or more snow in October in 42 of the 107 years on record.
In Boston, 0.4 inches of snow was recorded on Saturday and 0.6 inches on Sunday, setting probable new records for each day. The 1.1 inches recorded on Oct. 29, 2005 remains the all-time daily record for a single October day. On average, Boston has experienced a trace or more of snowfall during one in every four October months going back 120 years.

Providence recorded 1.1 inches on Saturday and 1.2 inches on Sunday. Both are in line to set records for those days, and they rank fourth and third for all time snowiest days in October, Rawlins says. The 2.5 inches which fell on Oct. 10, 1979 remains the most for any day in October in that city. Thus, this October becomes the second snowiest behind the same month in 1979. Records in Providence extend back to 1904.

As for total liquid precipitation, Binghamton, N.Y., to the west, has received 61.86 total inches through Oct. 31, far exceeding the previous all-time yearly total of 49.78 inches set in 2006, Rawlins says. As of Oct. 31, Hartford received 60.42 inches of precipitation (the 30-year average is 38.40 inches). The all-time annual total there, set in 2008, is 65.35 inches.

More Information

Preliminary precipitation totals for selected locations