

# Coldest night in 100 years

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SANTA CRUZ — A record low was set Sunday in Santa Cruz as people struggled to cope with the damaging effects of a freezing arctic air mass that has been gripping much of the West in recent days.

The epidemic of broken water pipes and partially frozen crops that began Saturday continued Sunday, with the prospect that the weather-related problems would continue Monday.

In Santa Cruz, the mercury dipped to 19 degrees early Sunday, the lowest in 100 years of record keeping, eclipsing the old mark of 20 degrees set Jan. 20, 1922, according to Santa Cruz weatherman

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Ronald MacDonald.

"Eventually we'll get back to normal lows in the 30s and 40s," he said. "But we've had a 29, a 24, a 21, and now a 19 (degree reading). That's four days in a row with temperatures continuing to drop each night under the influence of the dry arctic air mass."

Forecasters said relief was in sight for Christmas as the slow-moving chilly air mass was expected to move east. But icy temperatures were projected again Monday morning.

"We're calling for another night

of freezing temperatures, but after that it will slowly moderate and get a little warmer," said Jerry Steiger, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Watsonville flower grower Jeff Brothers had no estimate of the casualties, but said his losses included the blooms of tender varieties of such outdoor cut flowers as alstromeria and calla lily.

"We did a number of things but when it gets down that cold there's really nothing you can do," he said.

According to Brothers, the temperature Sunday morning dropped into the low 20s in the Pajaro Valley. He said he used a fogging sys-

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Lisa Ketchum of Valley Churches United brings extra warmth to fieldworker Adolpho Medina.

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tem, "mini-greenhouses" and a new radiant heat system — a type of portable propane-fueled burner — with limited success to ward off frost.

Brothers said the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau would probably spearhead a drive for some type of government assistance.

"It's going to be a pretty big hit to a bunch of area farmers," he said. "It really doesn't ever get this cold. I'm sure a lot of people could not prepare for it."

Plumbers, firefighters and water district workers were kept busy for the second straight day as water pipes froze and broke overnight, then flooded homes, businesses and intersections as they thawed during the day.

"One woman told me her roof was about to cave in and at another place the laundry room did cave in at an apartment complex," said Lisa Mage, who works for an answering service that handles several local plumbers.

"One guy is not only booked all through today, but he has 50 calls waiting when he calls in, it's really that extreme."

The Santa Cruz water district waived its customary \$18 shut-off fee for hundreds of customers with leaky pipes. About a dozen main breaks had to be repaired in the city in various locations as well.

"We're working on the worst ones first and going on to the next," a district official said.

The San Lorenzo Valley Water District estimated about 500 people

in the Huckleberry, Blue Ridge and upper areas of Zayante and Quail areas were without water because of the problem.

"We've had about 250 to 300 service line breaks between our main line and customers' homes," said Jim Mueller, district manager. "It's kept us kept us very busy. Beyond that, we've also had our own main lines freeze in some areas, causing us not to be able to pump water at our higher levels."

Mueller said the district's thermometer in downtown Boulder Creek reached a low of 19.

Some district equipment was damaged overnight when bearings in automatically controlled pumps burned out while trying to move water through frozen lines, he said.

"We've learned that lesson the hard way," Mueller said. "We've replaced some of those and are probably going to turn off for the night and let people feed off storage. We're asking them to conserve water when possible and not to waste water by leaving it running."

Local hardware stores did brisk business selling plumbing supplies. Shoppers who did not make it to Orchard Hardware in Capitola until later in the day went home empty handed.

Firefighters also answered the water shut-off calls and used portable vacuums to help pump some flooded homes and businesses, according to Santa Cruz battalion chief Bill Bailey.

Fire sprinkler systems were also damaged, heightening concerns in



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Irrigation water leaves this La Selva Beach field full of icicles.

the event of a blaze.

"We have a list now of buildings now that don't have sprinkler systems in service," he said.

The state Employment Development Department in the 2200 block of Soquel Avenue will be closed Monday and possibly a few days after Christmas as a result of a pipe break and lost power, spokesman Terry Savage said. He said calls would be handled in the Monterey office until then.

At the Valley Resource Center in Ben Lomond, who volunteers arrived to staff an emergency blanket and sleeping bag drive found the pipes in their own office had burst.

"There's water all over outside," said director Annette Marcum. "The problem with it is we just

talked to the plumber who told us he can't guarantee it's not going to break all over again. People are almost better off not fixing them until the temperature starts to rise."

Despite the mishap, Marcum said about 60 to 70 people lined up outside to bring blankets and sleeping bags to dispense to needy families.

Most were turned over to Jaime Valdez of the Davenport Resource Center who relayed them to an estimated 300 farm workers who work and live on the north coast from the edge of Santa Cruz to the county line.

"Those bunk houses are very cold, there's no insulation," he said. "They just cold anyway in the winter and with this cold wave, it's unbearable."