

End of winter? We have records to break, more snow to shovel

Cold and snow - again: Skilling full forecast

Staff report –Meteorological Winter in Chicago ends February 28 at midnight.

12:25 a.m. CST, February 26, 2014

The worst of winter should be over by the end of February. That would be Friday, when it will still be miserably cold. Then we'll get more snow, maybe a lot of it.

Temperatures are expected to drop below zero overnight Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night as we again get hit with cold air "in abundance," in the words of WGN-TV meteorologist Tom Skilling.

That's in keeping with a winter that has already delivered 22 days of lows below zero, Skilling noted. The 129-year-old record is 25 days below zero, a record that's clearly in danger.

Skilling says temperatures will average about 22 degrees below normal for the next five days, 20 degrees below normal for the five days after that, and 13 degrees below normal for the five days after that – which gets us into the middle of March.

This has been the third coldest winter in 143 years of recorded Chicago weather history, Skilling said, with about 7 days in 10 since November producing below-normal temperatures. Meteorological winter ends with February, marking the close of what is usually the coldest three months.

Highs aren't expected to get out of the low teens on either Wednesday or Thursday, with below-zero lows. The [National Weather Service has issued](#) a wind chill advisory for the region until noon Wednesday, with predicted wind chills ranging from 20 to 30 degrees below zero.

There isn't a lot of snow in the forecast for the rest of this week – some light snowfall is expected Friday – but look out next week.



Photos: Winter in Chicago



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- Cold, snowy, Chicago weather

A storm system that is expected to bring some rain to drought-ravaged California is headed this way early next week. It's too early to tell exactly where that snow will land or how much there will be, but Skilling did use these words to describe it: "Potentially significant."

By Michelle Manchir Tribune reporter

1:07 p.m. CST, March 1, 2014

Complaints from winter-worn Chicagoans are warranted. The weather for the past three months has broken into the top three snowiest and coldest winters on record.

Between the months of December and February, known as the meteorological winter, 67.4 inches of snow were recorded here, making it the third snowiest on record, according to the National Weather Service. It was also the third coldest meteorological winter on record, with an average temperature of 18.8 degrees between December and February.

The snowiest December through February in recorded history was 1978-79, when 80.6 inches fell. The coldest was 1903-04, when the average temperature December through February was 18.3 degrees.



The National Weather Service also tracks snowfall totals for months outside of December through February. When total snowfall for July 2013 to Saturday is taken into consideration that moves this season down to the fourth snowiest on record.

Barely a half inch of snowfall was recorded at O'Hare International Airport by 6 a.m. Saturday, the first day of March, bringing the total snowfall for the season so far to 68.9 inches, said meteorologist Gino Izzo.

It's likely not done yet. Two to five more inches could fall by Sunday evening, Izzo said.

It probably won't be enough to pass the snowfall total for the third snowiest July through June total – which was 1969-70 with 77 inches. In 1977-78, 82.3 inches were recorded. In 1978-79, the snowiest July through June season in Chicago on record, 89.7 inches were recorded.

There's a small chance for minor snowfall next week, too, Izzo said, while temperatures will remain below average for March. The forecast shows high temperatures in the 20s through Wednesday, while the average is in the low 40s, Izzo said.

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Another Chicago record? Winter had most days at or below zero--ever

March 03, 2014 | By Meredith Rodriguez | Tribune reporter



Commuters bundle up against the cold and snow on Michigan Avenue near Lake Street Monday, March 3, 2014. (Michael Tercha / Chicago Tribune)

It seems that weather rankings are in the eye of the beholder.

The National Weather Service has gauged this season's chills, in part, by noting the number of days with subzero temperatures from the start of November through the end of March. By that measure, the allegedly just-ended season had the fourth-most days with the mercury below zero.

But add in days when the temperature sunk to exactly zero, and suddenly, this season is Chicago's new No. 1.

"It looks like overall this winter has had the most zero or below," said weather service meteorologist Richard Castro. "So it's not just perception that it's felt particularly brutal this year. The numbers say it."

Monday morning's low of minus-2 degrees puts Chicago in fourth place by the narrower measurement.

Reframing the numbers to get to a No. 1 requires the addition of three days when the city's low temperature was right at zero, making for 26 total when it was that cold or colder. The previous record-holding season, 1884-85, had 25 subzero days and none right at zero.

Castro said temperatures likely will not reach zero or below again this season, as the nights are getting shorter and the Earth tilts toward the sun. However, this season's overall severity could still worsen when considering cold along with snow, Castro said.

"The combination for the two is definitely the most severe winter since the '70s," Castro said.

Chicago's 73.4 inches of snow so far this season, which the weather service counts as autumn through spring, stands at the fourth-most since 1884. That's slightly less than during 1969-70, which saw 77 inches. The only two years above those were in 1977-78 at 82.3 inches, and in 1978-79 at 89.7 inches total.

However, the weather service predicts more snow will hit Chicago on Tuesday night and possibly over the weekend, Castro said. That could push the city's snowfall total into second place, Castro said.

"We're within 10 inches of second place," Castro said, "So if we can get some snow out of these next couple of events ... you can't rule it out. And it doesn't really look like we're going to break out into another much warmer pattern any time soon."

As far as average temperatures go, Chicago is at its third-coldest season on record, at 18.8 degrees for "meteorological winter," or December through February. But widen the time frame to include November and March, Castro said, and who knows how cold the season would be.

"November through March periods would be something to look at this year to compare to previous seasons," Castro said. "We've never done that before. We've never had to. Meteorological seasons stood for themselves."

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