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Meteorologist: 'Be prepared' as winter storm looms

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Amid unseasonably high temperatures in the 60s Wednesday and Thursday, it might seem hard to believe the area could see freezing rain, sleet and snow by Friday.

But that's exactly what local meteorologist Landon Hampton is forecasting.

"I'm very confident that we're going to see winter precipitation with this system," he said.

Hampton, who founded and moderates the local weather source wxornotBG.com, said the shift will feel like a "huge change whenever we get into Friday."

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm watch for southcentral Kentucky that extends from 6 a.m. Friday into Friday night. The watch includes Warren, Barren, Edmonson, Logan and Simpson counties. Total snow accumulations of 2 to 4 inches are possible, along with up to a quarter inch of ice.

Although temperatures have been warm in recent days, Hampton said there's also more humidity. That moisture and an approaching cold front will create the conditions for freezing rain, which is rain that freezes on contact with surfaces at or below freezing. Hampton expects that freezing rain to transition into sleet and then snow, but as of Wednesday, he wasn't sure how much snow accumulation the area will get.

While road conditions could be a concern, Hampton stressed the importance of preparing instead of panicking.

"I always tell people: Don't be scared, be prepared," he said.

Hampton stressed the importance of driving safely.

"Don't speed. Take it easy. Don't tailgate," he said. "And if you see somebody stuck, lend them a helping hand."

Temperatures got off to an "unusually cold start" during the first week of 2018, according to state climatologist Stuart Foster, director of the Kentucky Climate Center and Kentucky Mesonet at Western Kentucky University.

According to Mesonet data, which draws from a statewide network of 69 weather stations, the lowest statewide temperature in 2017 was minus 3 degrees on Jan. 8 at a Taylor County station.

The network recorded a new low as early as Jan. 2 this year when a Lewis County station recorded a frigid minus 9 degrees, according to a news release.

Additionally, the Mesonet station at the WKU Farm tracked a low of minus 1 on Jan. 2 this year, compared to the lowest temperature of 7 degrees on Jan. 8, 2017.



Foster points to a weather phenomenon called La Nina, which occurs when in the equatorial Pacific cools. It's the opposite of El Nino, which is characterized by the warming of the same mass of water.

“We started 2017 with an El Nino and as 2017 came to an end we were in a weak La Nina phase that is projected to continue into spring before dissipating,” Foster said in the release.

Looking back at last year's weather, Foster said it was one of the state's most favorable.

“We really couldn't have asked for much better last year,” Foster told the Daily News, characterizing last year as a mild winter and pleasant summer. Additionally, precipitation was dispersed throughout the year, with some dry periods in the summer.

“It went down as one of our top 10 warmest years on record,” he said.

Last January and February saw temperatures 7 degrees above normal, according to the release. The unofficial average temperature was 57.7 degrees, making it the sixth warmest. The state's warmest average temperature on record is 58.7 degrees in 1921.

The state was also spared from heavy snowfall last year. Snowfall totals for 2017 were less than an inch in Bowling Green, according to the release.

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