



The 1998 Ice Storm - A Terrible Beauty

A City of Ottawa Archives Exhibit - 2003



Photo: Le Droit, Sylvain Marier

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Introduction: The 1998 Ice Storm - A Terrible Beauty

During the winter of 1998, a state of emergency was declared as the region was battered by an ice storm of unprecedented ferocity.

A Terrible Beauty highlights the efforts of community members that brought the people of Ottawa together to provide safety, shelter, food, and security during a catastrophic weather event.

The exhibition was prepared by the City of Ottawa Archives with contributions of various media outlets and presented at City Hall Art Gallery from September 24 to October 26, 2003.

Our virtual exhibits series captures past exhibit topics derived from the collections of the Archives – both from official City records and the numerous private collections, providing an opportunity to widely share the research prepared to support our exhibitions and outreach program.



Photo: Ray Thomas

A Terrible Beauty

The leafless trees came alive with a patina that reflected the sun. Hydro lines, wires fences and clotheslines sparked like diamond necklaces. It was beautiful.

But a second rainstorm struck, then a third. The growing weight of ice sent trees crashing to the ground destroying power lines and clogging roads. Transmission towers and hydro poles were bent and broken by the sheer weight of the ice. For more than three weeks people in the region suffered power outages. Many people were forced from their homes, and many paid an even higher price.

It was terrible.

Facts:

- The storm began on January 4, 1998, and ended on January 9 at about 8 p.m.
- 69.6 mm of freezing rain fell on Ottawa over the five days
- Over 1,000 power transmission towers were toppled, and more than 30,000 wooden utility poles.
- At the height of the storm, over 230,000 people in Ontario were left without electricity.
- Approximately 100,000 people had to take refuge in shelters.

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- Nearly 16, 000 Armed Forces personnel assisted with emergency measures and the restoration of the power grid, the largest peace-time deployment of Canadian troops ever.
- Soldiers teamed up with workers from 14 utility companies from 6 provinces and 8 American states.
- About 50,000 tons of brush was hauled away after the ice storm.

The Personal Experience



Low-Tech Learning: Seven-year-old Charlotte Eagan waits as sister Allison, 13, finishes her homework the old-fashioned way – by candlelight – in their blacked-out Glebe Ave. home last night. Photo: Ottawa Sun, Tony Caldwell

In extraordinary times, people do extraordinary things. The Ice Storm of 1998 was one of those extraordinary times.

Hundreds of Ottawa-Carleton citizens flocked to volunteer in emergency shelter and braved the elements going door to door checking on the welfare of neighbours and strangers. They shared generators, donated food, clothes, and firewood.



Photo: Le Droit, Étienne Morin

Some businesses opened their doors and became emergency shelters. Other donated tons of food and other goods and services.

People living in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton opened their businesses, wallets, and hearts.

Shelters

Where do you go if the lights go out and the furnace stop on one of the coldest nights of the year. And what's worse, you have no idea when the electricity will be restored.

Most found shelter from the cold and dark with family or friends, but many people had no place to go. They had to rely on one of the more than 20 shelters that were set up in schools and community centres throughout the Region.

The accommodations were basic, even spartan. Evacuees slept on cots donated by the Armed Forces and municipal employees and volunteers serviced thousands of donated meals.

The experience was a bit different for Nadia Ramalok and her three children "I woke up in the middle of the night and the house was very cold," says Ms Ramalok.

Ms. Ramalok lives in the Uplands area and discovered that the Uplands Military Police had offered their headquarters building as an emergency shelter. "So, I packed up my three kids, called two of my friends, who also had kids, and we went to the police building."

The children were a bit wary at first, but any mistrust disappeared when they were told to choose their own jail cell. The Armed Forces brought in movies and pizzas for the kids. "For the children it was an adventure...".

“A few months later I was driving by the Military Police building and my son turned and asked me if we could go back to that hotel again,” said Ms Ramalok.



Stanley and Kate Chambers were happy to bed down in the Osgoode Community Centre last night after freezing for two nights in their home. Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Julie Oliver

Heather Billinger, Vernon

When the ice storm struck and knocked out the power in Vernon, in the southwest corner of the Region, Heather Billinger just couldn't wait in the cold and dark. She had to do something. She and a few friends marched over to Vernon's recreation centre, which served as an ice storm shelter. They took over the kitchen and started to cook with a vengeance. They didn't finish for almost two weeks.

“We served about 8,000 meals at the shelter, over the time we were open,” said Ms. Billinger. The shelter volunteers put in 12-hour days, serving meals, and helping people adjust to shelter life. “It was hard work but because we were among friends it was fun. It also was really nice meeting people from Vernon that we had never met before.”



War Game: Nick Scott, 11, matches wits with Trooper Greg Nowak from Toronto's Queens York Rangers. Photo: Ottawa Sun, Tony Caldwell

The Generator

During the ice storm, portable generators became the lifeline for both rural and urban communities.

Sandra Garnett of Richmond loaned the family small Honda generator. "We were among the fortunate because we only had a day without power."

As the days of coping with the ice storm went by, the Garnetts heard from neighbours that were not as fortunate. "A neighbour told us about the difficulty her sister was having with a cattle pump and how difficult it was to find a generator," she said. She offered them the red Honda generator. "A few days later, I learned that the sister's power had been restored, but the generator had been loaned to another neighbour."

After about two weeks, they lost contact with the red generator. They never expected to see it again. Generators had become hot commodities.

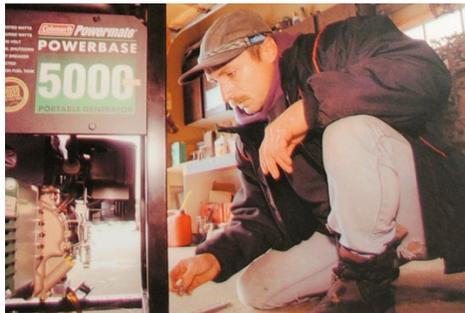
One quiet evening there was a knock on the door. There stood a stranger with our little red generator. "Sorry, we couldn't get it back to you sooner, he said, but we had the oil changed after all its hard work. We really appreciated having this. It meant I didn't have to spend 24 hours out in the barn." The man lived out past Ashton and had been the last one to use the generator.

A few weeks later, Ms. Garnett attended the Goulburn Ice Storm Celebration at the Richmond Arena. A neighbor had nominated them for a ribbon of appreciation. "The generator deserved that award. I was already rewarded with a greater gift - a renewed respect for the honesty and generosity of my neighbours."

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More than 1,000 shoppers were waiting in line for generators when the Home Depot on Cyrville Rd. opened yesterday, as homeowners struggle with power outages after last week's ice storm. Photo: Ottawa Sun, Peter Cutler



An exhausted David Bauer changes the oil in the generator at his father's home in North Gower. Photo: The Ottawa Sun, Errol McGihon

Generator facts

- Farmers were off the Hydro grid from five to a maximum of 23 days. The average was 16 days.
- Overall, an estimated 85 per cent of all farms did not have the proper standby power or tractor to operate their generators.
- A little over half of those surveyed had generators, but two-thirds of those were unequal to the task. Similarly, only half of the farmers had pole switches.
- Roughly 80 per cent of farm enterprises had a tractor that was either too large or too small to run their standby power unit; either they were not able to run their generator to full capacity or they ended up wasting precious diesel fuel.
- The quantity of fuel stored on hand became a serious concern, since fuel consumption averaged 35 gallons per day. With 100 gallons on hand, a farmer could run a standard

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generator for only three days; with a large generator, that time is reduced to a little more than a day

Dairy Farmers

The ice storm hit Ottawa-Carleton dairy farmers and their cattle very hard. Almost one-quarter of Canada's dairy cows were affected by the storm. Nearly 90% of Eastern Ontario's dairy farmers were without electricity at some time during the storm.

Most dairy farmers rely on machines run by electricity. They're used to a stable power supply and were unprepared for the massive power failure caused by the ice storm. Modern milking systems were rendered inoperative.

More than 10 million litres of milk, worth between \$5 and 6 million, had to be dumped.

Portable power generators became the farmer's lifeline. At first, those who had generators shared them. When the supplies of generators ran out, more arrived from elsewhere in Canada - and from as far away as Georgia, Texas, and California.

Farmers were run ragged, many surviving on less than two hours of sleep, for a week or more.



Photo: Le Droit, Sylvain Marier



Photo: Janice Tughan

Maple Syrup

For Giselle Proulx the ice storm has never really ended. She is a member of the third generation to tend a sugar bush at her family farm, in Cumberland.

After the ice storm, many experts predicted huge losses in maple syrup production - as much as 50% of eastern Ontario's \$4 million per year industry could be lost over the next 10 years.

For the most part, the past five years have proved the experts wrong. Generally, the average maple syrup production has been slightly lower since the ice storm. Not all the maple trees have died.

Her sugar bush is still producing, but Giselle Proulx wonders whether maple syrup production will play a part in the lives of the next generation.

Firewood

For urban dwellers, and most rural residents, firewood has become a luxury. Most of us use a combination of gas and electricity to prepare food and keep warm, while wood is saved for the occasional pleasant evening by the glow of the fireplace.



Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Bruno Schlumberger

During the ice storm, the demand for firewood skyrocketed, and quite quickly the need became desperate. The Region's Emergency Measures Unit responded by creating the post of Firewood Coordinator. A Regional roads engineer became the firewood coordinator and was quickly nicknamed "Woody".

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Woody scoured eastern Ontario for firewood and, with the help the military, found enough wood sources to meet the demand.

Then he struck the mother lode! Farmers from the Guelph area donated so much wood that purchasing was no longer necessary. But there was another problem. The wood had to be cut before it was suitable for burning.

This time, the provincial Department of Natural Resources came to the rescue. They sent crews to cut the wood down to stove and fireplace size and distributed it.

The Professional Experience

During ice storm 1998 emergency workers worked above and beyond the call of duty.

Along with their regular duties, fire departments in the urban areas helped their exhausted rural colleagues. Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and local community staff worked long hours keeping essential services running.

Canada's Military worked tirelessly helping hydro crews, patrolling rural areas and ensuring that people were warm and safe.

Hydro workers helped restore power outside their own areas. At the same time, hydro crews from other Ontario utilities, and from as far away as Ohio, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, were helping to restore power to the Region.



Greg Bols, the City of Ottawa worker, clears a huge branch from the sidewalk along Laurier Avenue East. Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Julie Oliver



Ottawa Hydro worker Bruce Bradley clears fallen branches from Hydro lines on Wavell Avenue. Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Dave Chan

Military

In January of 1998 Canadian soldiers, helmeted and in the battle dress, were engaged in a battle closer to home. They were helping the citizens of eastern Canada fight the “storm of the century”.

The largest deployment of troops in Canadian history began after the chair of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, Bob Chiarelli, declared a state of emergency on January 8. Regional officials were overwhelmed by the enormous amount of debris that was accumulating on roadways and hydro right-of-ways. Soldiers could help!

At the outset, the soldiers’ jobs seemed clear. They were to clear roads for emergency vehicles assist people in danger and help to prevent additional problems. They were to cut down trees before they could fall, causing further damage, clean up the mess left by the storm and help restore hydro installations. About 50 soldiers with telecommunications skills also helped telephone crews to restore service.

The military visited emergency shelters regularly, patrolled the roads and laneways and paid regular visits to those still in their homes, to make sure they were all right.

Soldiers from the 2nd Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery were on door-to-door patrol in Munster Hamlet late one Saturday night, when a man flagged them down. He told them that a young woman had fainted in a driveway. They found the young woman and, when they opened the door, found her unconscious boyfriend. Both have been overcome by carbon monoxide fumes. They both survived.

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Cpl. Mike McColeman carries Alex Dow, 79, from his home near Metcalfe to take him to Ottawa. Downed electrical wires around his home prevented Mr. Dow from getting out. Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Wayne Cuddington



Defense Minister Art Eggleton, left, gets a briefing on the situation in Metcalfe from Lt.-Col. Walter Natyncyk of the Royal Canadian Dragoons before touring the town. Photo: Ottawa Citizen, Chris Marula.



Photo: Department of National Defense, Sargent Marsha St-Denis.

Police

Because of the conditions, the police had to respond to a number of road accidents. In Ottawa alone, police reported 110 accidents on local roads over a 24-hour period.

And, as so many people in rural areas had left their homes, the police were concerned about break-ins. Officers from municipal police forces and the Ontario Provincial Police fanned out

over the RMOC and checked all suspicious vehicles. Sometimes they check the same vehicle two and three times. In Rideau and Osgoode townships, regular uniformed patrols were increased from 10 to 15 times the normal number.

The storm did not lead to many breaches of the law. Some generators were stolen, but the large numbers of police patrolling the Region kept generator theft to a minimum.

Police had to deal with breaches of etiquette, as well as of the law. One such breach concerned a man who said that he was in desperate need of wood. When police delivered the firewood, they discovered that he had seven cords of wood stashed in his garage. After some gentle persuasion the man delivered the wood to a needier neighbour.

Near the end of the storm, officers of the OPP and Ottawa-Carleton Police stationed in Osgoode collected \$1,000. They donated the money to the Township of Osgoode. Just one more example of the police working above and beyond the call of duty.

Red Ribbon

For many ice storm victims, a storm shelter was a last resort. Although their homes were dark and cold, most people chose to stay in them rather than make their way to an emergency shelter. Many people would warm up and eat at a shelter during the day and go home at night. They were putting themselves at risk, because cold and dark were not the only things they had to contend with. Carbon monoxide poisoning, hypothermia or fire were persistent threats.

It was impossible to check every house, so many municipal governments developed a simple but effective system. "If they were having trouble," said Brian Coburn, "people were asked to tie something red to a mailbox or other prominent place."

Brian Coburn credits Ivan Tanner, a Cumberland firefighter, for the idea. How did he get the idea?

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Photo of ice branches and trucks, Photo: Ottawa Sun, Peter Cutler



Photo of policeman on telephone, Photo: City of Ottawa, Jeff Crozier

Ed Muldoon

Ice storms weren't that big a deal for Ed Muldoon. In January 1998, he was Ottawa Hydro's director of operations. He was confident that Ottawa Hydro could handle anything that nature could dish out. Ice storms were old hat.

He had another reason to be confident: Ottawa Hydro and the other City of Ottawa departments were in the midst of planning for any emergency that could be caused by Y2K. But as he was driving home later that evening, Mr. Muldoon had a feeling that this storm would be different. By the evening of Wednesday, January 7, most of the circuits were repaired or partially repaired. "I felt pretty good about that." But on Wednesday night, the third storm hit, and 35 circuits went down again. The situation went from bad to worse.

Mr. Muldoon's phone rang at 2 a.m., telling him to report to the Emergency Measures Unit. "I staggered into the room that was established at Regional headquarters and sitting across from me was a group of these really fresh army guys. General Rick Hillier, the commanding officer,

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asked me what I needed. I needed people who were used to working around live wires and could do electrical work. We got all we needed!”

For Ottawa Hydro, the damage ended on the night of Friday, January 9, at about 8 p.m., when the last wave of rain stopped. “By that time our workforce had tripled,” he said. “We had hydro crews from all over metro Toronto, including North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke and Oakville. Crews from Guelph Hydro also came to our aid. We owe these fellows a lot.”



Photo of men at computer stations

Photo: Wayne Hlebert, Ottawa Citizen

“I look into the command center/war room of Ottawa Hydro.” System operator Gabor Samogyl at work in the System Office. They determine which lines have power so that the crews can conduct repairs.

Light of her life: Eleonore Duffey, 84, smacks a big kiss on her blackout hero, Chris Charlebois, whose Ottawa Hydro crew lit up Duffey’s Dovercourt Avenue home after 36 hours of darkness.



Photo of hydro workers receiving a kiss

Photo: Ottawa Sun, Alex Urosevic

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Long day: Kemptville hydro worker Simon Else works well into the dusk in the seemingly endless quest to bring electricity - and normal life - back to the community.



Photo of hydro worker fixing a line. Photo: Ottawa Sun, Tony Caldwell

Volunteer Fire Service



Photo: Le Droit, Étienne Morin

Long days, long nights, and little sleep, that's how Sterling Howie remembers the ice storm. Even before the state of emergency was declared on January 8, 1998, rural fire stations were dealing with ice storm damage. They kept up their exhausting pace throughout the ice storm.

“We would also make regular patrols of the more isolated parts of our community,” Mr. Howie said. “We wanted to make sure that vulnerable people were looked after. At first, we felt that older people were at risk, but they were used to the woodstoves and coal oil lamps. Many younger people had a hard time.”

Throughout the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton firefighters, we're not having an easy time of it. In Rideau Township, they had to deal with about 25 ice-storm-related fires. Two houses were destroyed. Misuse of generators and heating equipment resulted in thirty-six people suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Rural firefighters led the endless search for generate generators. Because there was no power, many basements were flooded. Firefighters needed the generators to run sump pumps and to power up furnaces.

Public Health

You'd better have a lot of time if you want to ask Janice Tughan what she did during the ice storm! Janice was a public health nurse with the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. During the ice storm she worked in the Goulburn area.

“We handled emergencies first, provided information on things like carbon monoxide poisoning, hypothermia and food safety. We also made sure that people had sufficient firewood and water,” she said.

Health nurses, together with police, firefighters, and the military, knocked on doors, making sure that citizens were safe and warm in their homes.

“We visited the shelters twice a day,” said Janice Tughan. They went to look after people's health and physical comfort, but they also provided emotional support.

Storm baby

(From the Ottawa Sun) Tasha Geymonat's beautiful little boy will forever be known as the “ice storm baby.” “It was an unusual delivery, for sure,” recalls Geymonat, admitting her first-born has become a conversation piece.

Geymonat gave birth to 8 lb., 4 oz. Jesse in the back of a Chevrolet Blazer, when icy roads brought her trip to the hospital's delivery room to a standstill.

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The two paramedics who helped her delivery, Mark Lafleur and Bill Magladry, were the first in what was to become a long line of storm heroes.

Jesse is now a happy, healthy, and growing bundle of joy who has brought the family unexpected celebrity status.



Photo of two officers kissing woman who gave birth
Photo: Ottawa Sun, Peter Cutler

Bob Chiarelli

A phone ringing at 3 a.m. is usually not good news. So when Bob Chiarelli, the chair of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, was jolted awake at about 3 a.m. on January 8, 1998, by a telephone phone call, he knew something was amiss.

“I woke up in the dark, dressed in the dark and had to shave with only the light of a candle to guide me.”

The roads were treacherous and downed power lines were littering the streets. “They didn't trust me to drive to the Regional Headquarters by myself, so the EMU sent a police car to pick me up. Driving downtown was a very eerie experience. Ice was coating trees; the fallen wires and trees were crisscrossing the road.”

Mr. Chiarelli, along with other members of the Emergency Response Team were briefed on the mounting crisis. This emergency briefing led to the declaration of the state of emergency at 10 a.m. on January 8, 1998.

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Photo: Jeff Crozier, City of Ottawa

Merv Beckstead

If there were a model motto for the ice storm it might have been, “Disasters have no boundaries!” Merv Beckstead, the Region of Ottawa-Carleton's chief administrative officer, uttered those words when a nursing home outside of the RMOC boundary requested a generator.

The best example of the temporary erasing of the Region's boundary lines came hours after the declaration of the state of emergency. “The roads from Petawawa to Ottawa were ice-covered,” said Doug Brousseau, manager of the RMOC's Emergency Measures Unit. “The ice storm was making it impossible for the army to get to Ottawa, so we dispatched a salt truck. It led dozens of military vehicles into Ottawa. It was like it was laying rose petals in front of them.”

Jim Watson

Like the mayors of the other Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton municipalities, Mr. Watson was spending a lot of time at City Hall directing the relief effort.

The Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton had the overall coordination of the emergency. But it was up to the municipalities, including Ottawa, to do the front-line relief work.

Emergency Measures Unit

It doesn't look like the nerve centre, but it was. For almost three weeks this inconspicuous office located on the main floor of Ottawa's City Hall was the nerve centre of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa- Carlton's ice storm emergency response.

The Emergency Operations Center houses three televisions and cubicles for each member of the control group. Each of the 16 cubicles is equipped with two-way radios, telephones, and internet connection.

Twenty people would pack the EOC but during the peak of the ice storm 40 people were jammed in.

Prior to January 1998 the EMU did the routine work involved in preparing for an emergency. They planned for the worst.

It was here that the Emergency Control Group met during the ice storm to coordinate the relief efforts. The Emergency Control Group is made up of the Regional Chair, the Chief Administrative Officer, the Chief of police the regional fire coordinator, the Medical Officer of Health, the commissioners of social services, environment, and transportation.

We would like to acknowledge the collaborative efforts of all former mayors of the 12 RMOC municipalities during the ice storm:

Glenn Brooks	Patrick Murray
Claudette Cain	Merle Nicholds
Bob Chiarelli	Mary Pitt
Guy Cousineau	Doug Thompson
Dwight Eastman	Janet Stavinga
Gerry Lalonde	Jim Watson

Epilogue



Photo: "A Ray of Light and Hope", 1998, Ray Thomas

There is no doubt that the ice storm was a disaster. It crippled most of North-Eastern North America for weeks. People were injured and many lost their lives, and the economic damage was devastating. But it taught this City a valuable lesson.

Since the ice storm, new emergency equipment has been added to the Emergency Measures Unit's inventory. "We have purchased hundreds of generators and cots," said, Mayor Bob Chiarelli. "We have upgraded even further since the events of September 11, 2001 in terms of nuclear, biological and chemical challenges."

After the ice storm thousands of generators were purchased, many by dairy farmers. So, when the power failed on Friday, August 15, 2003, and plunged most of eastern North America into darkness, most of the dairy herds in the Ottawa area got milked. Thank God for the ice storm.

Trees

The area lost about 10% of its tree cover; 70% of the remaining trees were seriously damaged.

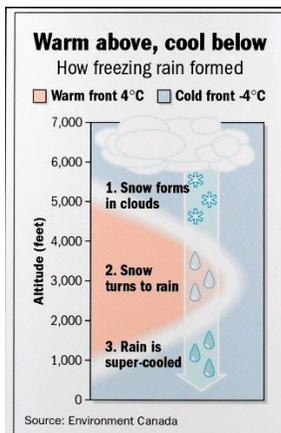
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The Tree Canada Foundation's Mike Rosen was one of the organizations involved in the Mayor's Task Force on Re-leafing Ottawa. Tree Canada raised more than \$700,000 from the private sector for the re-leafing project.

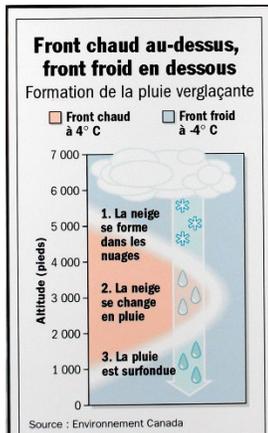
During the ice storm Mike Rosen was a forester with the Ontario Department of Natural Resources. His job was to give people unbiased information about their damaged trees. For two years their job was to give advice to landowners about their trees.

The services were even more valuable because certain companies were giving property owners uninformed advice. There were also charging very high fees for their services.

The Weather

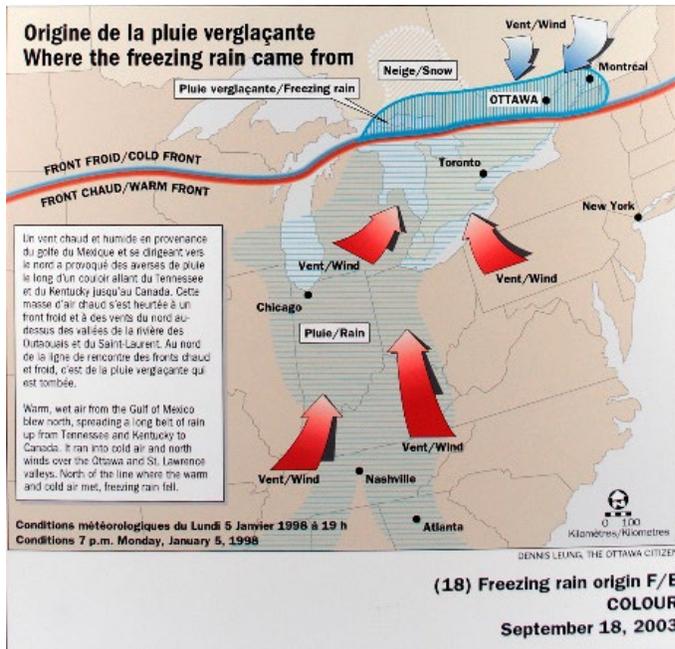


(13) Freezing rain
COLOUR
January 13, 1998



(18) Freezing rain F
COLOUR
September 18, 2003

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Credits

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