

The Big Freeze

Over the past few weeks, many countries have experienced severe problems due to the cold temperatures, ice and snow. The weather has cost economies millions of dollars, as businesses have been forced to close and transport links have failed.

Much of Europe was badly hit from mid-December 2009 to mid-January 2010. Schools, colleges, businesses and industries closed as huge amounts of snow fell, and temperatures stayed well below freezing for several weeks. In England this was its longest period of cold in 30 years and temperatures frequently fell to between -5 and -10 degrees, whilst in Scotland they fell to -15 and -20 Celsius. This led to a dramatic increase of 30% in demand for gas, as people struggled to stay warm.

Other parts of Europe were also badly affected, including Germany, Poland, France, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Parts of Norway and Sweden saw the coldest temperatures since the mid-1980s, at -30 to -40C in places.

The strange weather conditions were due to cold air coming down from the Arctic regions, instead of the warmer air which generally comes up from the south-west across the Atlantic. This unusually cold weather affected parts of America and Asia, as well as northern Europe. In Beijing and the port of Tianjin, China, 30cm of snow fell, with temperatures dropping well below normal for the time of year (-15C), and more snow than in the last 60 years. The government invited hundreds of Chinese citizens to help clear the roads to let traffic flow. In Japan it was a similar story, whilst in Seoul, South Korea, they experienced the heaviest snowfall since records began.

Furthermore, in the 'sunshine' state of Florida, US, instead of T-shirts and swimming costumes, shocked tourists had to wear warm clothes. Local farmers worried about their orange, lemon and other fruit crops, all badly damaged by the cold. Meanwhile, iguana lizards fell from trees, unable to cope with the weather conditions.

While some people are using the freezing conditions to question global warming, other parts of the globe, such as southern Europe, Canada and parts of the US, have experienced mild and warm winter weather. In Australia, the summer temperatures are even higher than normal: in Melbourne on the 12th January, they experienced the hottest night since 1902, at 34C. Moreover, experts remind us that *weather* is not the same as *climate*: the weather is what we experience on a day-to-day basis, whereas the climate is the patterns of weather over many years.

Exercise 1

Scan read the text very quickly and find out how many countries are mentioned.

Exercise 2

Re-read the text and match the country to the incident. One incident is used twice:

COUNTRY/STATE	WHAT HAPPENED
China	Energy needs grew by one third
Spain	Fruit harvests were badly affected and animals suffered
South Korea	The warmest night in over a century
Britain	They recorded the biggest snowfall ever
Canada	They had very mild weather over the same period
Florida	-30 to -40 Celsius
Norway and Sweden	Local people cleared snow from the streets
South Eastern Australia	

Exercise 3

Answer the following questions:

- What caused this strangely cold weather in many parts of the world?
- Is this evidence that global warming is not happening?
- What are the two most interesting or surprising pieces of information in the text?

Exercise 4

Without looking at the text, complete these sentences with an appropriate collocation:

- 1 Over the past few weeks, many countries have experienced _____ due to the cold temperatures, ice and snow.
- 2 Much of Europe was _____ from mid-December 2009 to mid-January 2010.
- 3 Schools, colleges, businesses and industries closed as _____ of snow fell.
- 4 This led to a _____ in demand for gas, as people struggled to stay warm.

- 5 The strange _____ were due to cold air coming down from the Arctic regions.
- 6 In Florida, America, instead of T-shirts and swimming costumes, shocked tourists had to wear _____.

Glossary

severe (adjective) – very serious and bad, worrying

transport link (noun) – rail, road etc connections from one place to another

dramatic (adjective) – sudden and surprising; easy to notice

demand (noun) – the amount of a product or service that people want

affect (verb) – to change or influence something, often in a negative way

flow (noun) – the continuous movement of something

crop (noun) – a plant that is grown for food

iguana (noun) – a large lizard with sharp points on its back that lives in tropical parts of North and South America