Snow falls in Florida as 12 die in harsh winter weather across US

- State of emergency in parts of Georgia as cold grips deep south
- Drivers warned of treacherous conditions mainly along Atlantic seaboard

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Brutal winter weather that has brought subzero temperatures to parts of the US and has been blamed for at least 12 deaths was threatening on Wednesday to dump snow and ice across parts of the south that rarely see flurries, much less accumulation.

The National Weather Service (NWS) said a wintry mix of snow and freezing rain was expected mainly along the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to North Carolina. It warned that icy roads and low visibility could make driving treacherous.

In Savannah, a coastal city that has not seen measurable snowfall since February 2010, up to 2in (5cm) of snow and sleet were forecast. As city officials filled dump trucks with sand to spread on major streets, the mayor, Eddie DeLoach, urged residents to stay home and keep off the roads.

“The streets will be slick,” DeLoach told a news conference on Tuesday. “We could have some serious issues for folks who aren’t used to driving in this kind of weather.”
Governor Nathan Deal of Georgia declared a state of emergency through Friday for 28 counties because of the frigid weather. The weather service said up to 1 in (2.5 cm) of snow could fall as far south as Tallahassee, Florida. Snow began falling in Tallahassee early on Wednesday – a rare occurrence in the Florida city. Accumulation of 3 in to 5 in (8 cm to 13 cm) was possible in eastern North Carolina.

In central Florida, the state’s largest theme parks announced that water attractions such as Disney’s Typhoon Lagoon, Universal Orlando’s Volcano Bay and SeaWorld’s Aquatica were closed on Wednesday because of the cold snap.

In Brunswick, Georgia, on the Atlantic coast, law enforcement agencies reported freezing rain and ice on bridges early on Wednesday in south Georgia as a winter storm revved up along the east coast. Brunswick police reported on their official Twitter account that area bridges had begun to ice up.

The icy conditions were also hampering early morning travel in Florida, as authorities were forced to shut a stretch of Interstate 10 east of Tallahassee.

In Atlanta, where the temperature fell to 13 F (-11 C) before dawn on Tuesday, Dr Brooks Moore, associate medical director in the emergency department of Grady Health System, said: “We have a group of patients who are coming in off the street who are looking to escape the cold – we have dozens and dozens of those every day.”
Warming shelters were opened across the south as freeze watches and warnings blanketed the region, including hard freeze warnings for much of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.