

Record temperatures set on Dec. 11

By Sue Tiffin

Peter Kimbell, warning preparedness meteorologist at Environment Canada said the numbers recorded at observation sites used in the Haliburton County area are not representative of the peak winds we actually had on Dec. 11. Checking nearby observation sites in Algonquin Park, in Bancroft, and in Beatrice, Kimbell said the highest wind recorded was 65 km/h.

"So that's not generally going to knock out power," he said. "There were higher gusts, but we don't have any observations to document that."

Kimbell noted that forested areas near the towers would dampen wind substantially.

"I do know that in every case when we have strong winds, those sites in particular never really show them. Although they are there, and the fact that you have power outages prove that point."

Peak winds across the province were recorded in Point Petrie and Port Colborne at 130 km/h, at 115 km/h at Windsor airport and at Kingston airport at 108 km/h.

"They're not likely going to be that high up in your neck of the woods, because typically those higher winds are reported basically off of the lake where there's very little friction," said Kimbell. "With maximum exposure to the lake, given that there's no friction [trees, buildings, etc.] over the lake, or very little friction, the winds are always higher there. Waves do cause a bit of friction, but there's much less friction over the lake than the land, and consequently the winds are reported are always less over land."

Kimbell said Environment Canada's wind warning threshold is 70 km/h, or gusts to 90 km/h.

"Our warning thresholds are designed to kind of capture some of the impacts, so we expect that we would start to see impacts when we see winds sustained at 70 km/h or gusts to 90," he said. "Our observation sites didn't show that, but I just know that they often underreport what is actually happening."

While we've seen winds like this before, Kimbell said what is unusual is the fact that it was so warm, for December. In Bancroft, the temperature reached 12.2 C on Dec. 11. Bancroft's period of record goes back to 1882, and the previous record for temperature on Dec. 11 in 1897 was 11.1 C. Algonquin Park reached 11.5 C this past Dec. 11, which beat the record of 8.9 set on the same day in 1949. The highest December temperature recorded at a volunteer station in Haliburton was 14.5 C set on Dec. 5 in 2001.

"Warm weather on Dec. 11 has definitely happened before, but this would be the warmest Dec. 11," said Kimbell. "Consequently, this kind of storm, anomalously warm temperatures often go together with storms in winter time. In winter time, if you're going to get anomalously warm temperatures, it's almost always because there's a storm funnelling that warm air up northward. Consequently if there's a storm there's going to be wind. They all go together. Is it unprecedented? Well, it's certainly very unusual, let's put it that way."