Local residents bundle up for winter weather

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The first below-freezing temperatures of the year have ushered the Brazos Valley into December, finally allowing residents to trade in the shorts and tank tops they were wearing earlier in the week for coats, gloves and scarves.

The National Weather Service in Houston recorded a high of 37 degrees at Easterwood Airport on Thursday with a wind chill between 25 and 30 degrees. The record low for Dec. 1 -25 degrees, set in 1979 - is not likely, officials said, but the temperature was predicted to drop to 29 degrees overnight with low temperatures remaining in the low to mid-30s through Monday morning.

David Toback, a physics professor at Texas A&M University, moved to Texas from Chicago about five years ago. Although he admits he wore a jacket Thursday, he said this is not wool cap and coat-worthy weather.

"This is not terribly cold to me. I run in the mornings, and I can remember it being a couple of degrees below zero with a foot of snow outside, and that wouldn't deter me from running," Toback said. "The significant drop in temperature is what gets me. It was 80 degrees [on Wednesday], and now it's 30. I notice that."

The low numbers prompted residents to take steps in protecting their pets and homes from the frigid weather. Mike Marberry, general manager of Lowe's in Bryan, said hundreds of customers braved the windy weather to purchase items such as duct tape and cheesecloth.

"We had a pretty good rush on [Wednesday], but [Thursday] was the peak. Everybody is looking to buy pipe insulation, duct tape and frost blankets so they can wrap their pipes and cover their plants," he said.

"A lot of people are also buying rock salt for their porches and driveways to keep any ice melted down where they're going to be walking," he said.

Customers at PetSmart in College Station were also making weather-related purchases, according to manager John Litton. In addition to an increase in the

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sale of dog houses and pet beds, dog sweaters also have been flying off the shelves, he said.

"We are selling a lot [of pet sweaters] right now. More than usual," he said. "People want to take care of their pets. They want them to be safe and comfortable in all weather."

Litton and Marberry agree that the increased business at their stores is not a sign of a community overreacting.

"I think people are reacting very reasonably," Marberry said. "It's smart to be prepared and have supplies on hand for when you need them. You never can tell what's going to happen."

Toback admitted that he thought Texans' reactions to cold weather were humorous, but understandable.

"It's all relative," he said. "I just giggle when I see people wearing coats, hats, scarves and gloves, and they have flip-flops on their feet. No matter how cold it is, people insist on wearing flip-flops. I don't get it."

- Remove, drain and store hoses. Keep the outside valve open so that any water remaining in the pipe can expand without causing the pipe to break.
- Pipes should be carefully wrapped, with ends butted tightly and joints wrapped with tape. Newspaper can provide significant protection.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing.
- Let the cold water drip from the faucet served by exposed pipes.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature both during the day and night.

Source: American Red Cross, www.redcross.org

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