

Winter Weather Information Facts

- A wide range of weather conditions can occur during a **winter storm**, including snow, sleet, and ice accumulations, strong winds leading to blowing and drifting snow, and dangerously cold temperatures.
- **Winter storms** can affect a large area, even portions of multiple states, and can last for many days. Regions affected by a winter storm can be crippled for several days, with the effects felt for weeks. Travel becomes dangerous and even impossible.
- **Blizzard** conditions occur when falling snow and strong winds, frequently at speeds of 35 mph or more, combine to produce blinding, wind-driven, blowing snow and severe drifting. Visibilities in a blizzard are significantly reduced, often to under a quarter of a mile, making travel virtually impossible.
- A **ground blizzard** occurs when strong winds and existing snow cover lead to blowing snow and visibilities reduced to a quarter mile or less. The sky may be clear during a ground blizzard.
- **Heavy snow** can immobilize a region and paralyze a city, stranding commuters, stopping the flow of supplies, and disrupting emergency and medical services. Accumulations of snow can collapse buildings, break large tree limbs, and down power lines. In rural areas, homes and farms may be isolated for days. Snow can accumulate as much as 3 or 4 inches in an hour during intense snowstorms.
- **Lake effect snow** develops over open water of a lake and blows onto land. Lake effect snow results from cold air residing over a large, unfrozen lake, such as Lake Superior, and can affect locations as much as 20 miles inland from the lakeshore. Very large accumulations can occur, mainly because the conditions favorable for lake effect snow can persist for several days.
- **Ice storms** can be exceptionally damaging, as large ice accumulations can down trees, electrical wires, and telephone poles. Communications and power can be lost for days. Even small accumulations of ice can cause extreme hazards to motorists and pedestrians.
- Extreme cold often accompanies a winter storm or is left in its wake. The combination of cold temperatures and wind produces a **wind chill**, which is a cooling effect on exposed skin. Prolonged exposure to the cold can be dangerous and life-threatening, causing hypothermia or frostbite.

Before a Winter Storm Strikes

- Monitor National Weather Service forecasts, statements, watches, and warnings for the latest information on a developing winter storm. National Weather Service websites and NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards provide a direct link to this information.
- Winterize your vehicle. Keep antifreeze fresh. Assure you have a strong car battery. Use snow tires.
- Keep a **winter survival** kit in your car:
 - blankets or sleeping bags
 - a flashlight with extra batteries
 - a first-aid kit
 - a knife
 - high-calorie...non-perishable food

- a small can and water-proof matches to melt snow for drinking
 - a bag of sand or cat litter
 - a shovel
 - a windshield scraper and brush
 - booster cables
- Winterize your home by installing storm windows, adequate insulation and caulking, and weather-stripping doors and windows.
 - Stock extra batteries for radios and flashlights.
 - Consider a safe alternate heat source, and keep a ready supply of fuel.

Winter Weather Forecast Information

- **Hazardous Weather Outlooks** from the National Weather Service provide information on developing winter weather up to a week before it occurs. Although specific information, such as expected snow amounts, may not be known until a day or two before a winter storm, the outlook can provide general information on when and where a storm might occur.
- A **Winter Storm Watch** is issued when severe winter conditions are possible within the next few days. A **Blizzard Watch** may also be issued if blizzard conditions are expected.
- A Winter Storm Warning is issued when severe winter conditions, featuring a combination of winter weather types, are occurring or are imminent. **Blizzard, Heavy Snow, Ice Storm, Lake Effect Snow,** and **Sleet warnings** may also be issued if only one weather type is expected to occur.
- **Wind Chill watches** and **warnings** may be issued when life-threatening wind chill values are expected.
- An **advisory** is issued when conditions warrant increased public awareness or moderately hamper travel but are not severe enough to merit a warning.

During a Winter Storm

- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, local radio, or television, or monitor National Weather Service websites for the latest weather reports and emergency information.
- If you plan to be outside, dress in layered clothing and avoid over-exertion.
- Wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of the head.
- If your vehicle becomes stranded, stay with it until help arrives. Do not try to walk for help during a winter storm, as conditions may suddenly worsen with little advance warning.