

# Blizzard Awareness

---

Usually lethal storms are associated with tornadoes and hurricanes, the storms of the summer, but major winter storms can be just as lethal. Preparing for cold weather conditions and responding to them effectively can reduce the dangers caused by winter storms.

It is important to identify the different types of winter storms. These storms include blizzards, blowing snow, snow squalls, snow showers, snow flurries and ice storms. A winter storm is considered a blizzard when there are winds of 35 mph or more with snow and blowing snow reducing visibility to less than 1/4 mile for at least three hours.

Blowing snow storms consist of wind-driven snow that reduces visibility. **Blowing snow** may be falling snow and/or snow on the ground picked up by the wind. **Snow squalls** are brief, intense snow showers that are accompanied by strong, gusty winds. Accumulation from a snow squall may be significant. **Snow showers** are when snow falls at varying intensities for brief periods of time. Some accumulation is possible. **Snow flurries** are light snowfalls for short durations with little or no accumulation. **Ice storms** usually occur when freezing rain or sleet is present.

Different regions usually experience storms common to the geographical area. The Mid Atlantic and New England States are more likely to experience heavy snow showers, blizzards and ice storms. Southeastern and Gulf Coast States are more likely to experience ice storms or occasional snowfall. The Midwest and Plains States are more susceptible to heavy snow showers, blizzards and ice storms; while the Rocky Mountain States have heavy snow showers and blizzards. And in Alaska, heavy snow showers and blizzards are the common winter storms.

There are different winter weather warnings to advise the public of adverse winter conditions. If a **winter storm watch** is issued, be alert, a storm is likely. **Winter weather advisory** is issued when winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists. A **frost or freeze warning** indicates below freezing temperatures are expected and may cause damage to plants, crops or fruit trees. When a **winter storm warning** is issued, take action, the storm is in or entering the area. A **blizzard warning** indicates snow and strong winds will combine and produce blinding snow, near zero visibility, deep drifts and life-threatening wind chill--seek refuge immediately.

Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have come up with a rating system for **snowstorms**. The rating system will be used in the Northeast region of the United States and may extend to other regions after further study. This rating system is to be used in a way that is similar to how hurricanes and tornadoes are rated. The rating system will be used to compare current storms right after they strike with others that have occurred and is not a warning device.

The rating is based on factors such as inches of snow, land area affected and its impact on people. The scale is being tested in the Northeast because of the impact winter storms have on the economy and transportation in those areas. The scale ranks storms in the following way using 5 levels of intensity:

- 1 = Notable
- 2 = Significant
- 3 = Major
- 4 = Crippling
- 5 = Extreme

The Northeast Snowfall Impact Scale will be calculated by the National Climatic Data Center.

Preparing a **winter storm kit** is a great way to brace yourself for winter weather. Here is a list of things to have on hand to be prepared in case a blizzard occurs in your area:

- Extra blankets
- Extra warm clothing including a warm coat, gloves or mittens, hats and warm, water-resistant boots
- First aid kit
- Essential medications
- Battery-powered NOAA weather radio, flashlight and extra batteries
- Canned food and can opener
- Bottled water (at least one gallon of water per person per day to last at least three days)

After a winter storm:

- Continue listening to local radio or television stations or a NOAA Weather Radio for updated information and instructions. Access may be limited to some parts of the community, or roads may be blocked.
- Help a neighbor who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people and people with disabilities. Elderly people and people with disabilities may require additional assistance. People who care for them or who have large families may need additional assistance in emergency situations.
- Avoid driving and other travel until conditions have improved. Roads may be blocked by snow or emergency vehicles.
- Avoid overexertion. Heart attacks from shoveling heavy snow are a leading cause of deaths during winter.
- Follow forecasts and be prepared when venturing outside. Major winter storms are often followed by even colder conditions.

## **Commonly Asked Questions**

**Q. *What is a winter storm watch?***

**A.** Winter storm WATCH means a winter storm is possible in your area.

**Q. *What is a winter storm warning?***

**A.** Winter storm WARNING means a winter storm is headed for your area.

**Q. *What is a blizzard warning?***

**A.** Blizzard WARNING means strong winds, blinding wind-driven snow, and dangerous wind chill are expected. Seek shelter immediately.

**Q. *What should I do if a winter storm watch is issued?***

- A.**
- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio, local radio, and TV stations or cable TV such as The Weather Channel for further updates.
  - Be alert to changing weather conditions.
  - Avoid unnecessary travel. .

**Q. *What should I do if a winter storm warning is issued?***

- A.**
- Stay indoors during the storm.
  - If you must go outside, several layers of lightweight clothing will keep you warmer than a single heavy coat. Gloves (or mittens) and a hat will prevent loss of body heat. Cover your mouth to protect your lungs.
  - Walk carefully on snowy, icy sidewalks.
  - After the storm, if you shovel snow, be extremely careful. It is physically strenuous work, so take frequent breaks. Avoid overexertion.
  - Avoid traveling by car in a storm, but if you must...
  - Carry a disaster supplies kit in the trunk.
  - Keep your car's gas tank full for emergency use and to keep the fuel line from freezing.
  - Let someone know your destination, your route and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.

## **Sources For More Information**

<http://www.redcross.org/>

The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration:

<http://www.noaa.com/>

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/index.shtml>