Winter Weather Advisories

The National Weather Service (NWS) has a number of winter weather advisories that depend on the particular situation at hand. Below is a list of common winter weather advisories. Please note this list is not exhaustive. Go to www.weather.gov/help-map for a complete list of all weather watches and warnings.

Winter Weather Advisory
Issued when a weather system is bringing in winter weather (snow, sleet, freezing rain) that could pose a hazard.

Winter Storm Watch
Issued when there is a potential for significant snow or ice accumulations in the next 24-36 hours.

Winter Storm Warning
Issued when a winter storm is or is forecasted to produce significant snow or ice accumulation.

Blizzard Watch
Issued when a winter storm has the potential to produce winds over 35 mph and blowing/falling snow that reduces visibility to less than a quarter mile.

Blizzard Warning
Issued when a winter storm has winds over 35 mph and blowing/falling snow that reduces visibility to less than a quarter mile for three hours or more.

Freezing Rain Advisory
Issued when freezing rain or freezing drizzle is forecast but accumulation is not expected to be significant.

Ice Storm Warning
Issued when a freezing rain produces a significant or damaging amount of ice.

Blizzard and Extreme Cold Safety and Precautions

Like all hazardous weather, it is important to be safe during blizzards and the extreme cold. The following tips can help you stay safe and warm during these winter hazards.

- Stay indoors! It is important to stay indoors in a well-insulated building, and to only leave if you must, especially in extremely cold temperatures and wind chills.
- If you must leave, be sure to leave as little exposed skin as possible. Remember to wear such articles as hats, gloves/mittens, scarves, heavy coats, boots, and warm socks.
- When drive on snow-packed, icy roads, or there is low visibility, drive slowly and do not brake fast. If you are a passenger, do not distract the driver and let him or her focus on the road.
- Warm up your car before driving. This will allow your engine to warm up to safe operating temperatures. However, DO NOT heat your car open in a closed garage. This can lead to carbon monoxide (an invisible poison gas) filling your garage.
- Leave your home’s faucets dripping. This will movement in your pipes and will prevent them from freezing.

For more info on Winter Storms, go to: http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/winter/

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Winter Storms and Blizzards

A **Winter Storm** is a storm system that causes the accumulation of snow and ice. Typically, winter storms are accompanied by cold temperatures and wind.

A **Blizzard** is defined by the National Weather Service as the following occurring for three hours or more:

- A system having sustained winds or gusts of greater than or equal to 35 mph
- Considerable falling OR blowing snow

The criteria for both of these types of storms varies by location. For example, for a winter storm warning to be issued, the snowfall requirements are significantly higher in Minneapolis, MN compared to Birmingham, AL.

Winter Storms and Blizzards usually occur during the winter season, but winter precipitation can occur year-round, particularly on mountain tops. For most parts of the northern and northeastern United States, the threat of winter weather begins in late October and ends in late March. In the Southern portion of the United States, the threat for winter weather is primarily from January to early March.