



# **DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE COLD:**

## **WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS TIPS**

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The first major winter storm of 2018 to hit the United States resulted in blizzard warnings from Virginia to Maine, knocked out power for at least 300,000 residents and killed 22 people.

Winter Storm Grayson, also known as “the bomb cyclone” because of the big atmospheric pressure drop, pummeled the East Coast in early January. The storm dropped measurable frozen precipitation in places not accustomed to winter weather (like Florida and coastal Georgia) and more than a foot of snow in Boston.

What’s 2019 shaping up to look like? NOAA is predicting a mild 2018-19 winter for much of the U.S., with above-average temperatures likely for many areas, especially the western half of the country. (NOAA does not predict seasonal snowfall accumulations.)

However, as Grayson showed, it only takes one winter storm to cause disruptions. Even warmer-than-average winters usually produce snowfall for much of the U.S. **And since most storms only come with a few days’ notice, emergency preparedness managers need to be ready well before winter weather strikes.**

While winter weather impacts vary across the country, all businesses should have a winter weather preparedness plan. By helping your employees get ready, you can protect your business operations and reduce the likelihood that a storm interrupts your productivity.



## Watches And Warnings:

### Know Your Winter Weather Alerts

The National Weather Service issues three main winter weather alerts. Sign up for these alerts and any local notifications your community may offer to be better prepared for winter storms.



#### Winter storm watch:

Issued when the potential exists for heavy snow or significant ice accumulations, usually at least 24 to 36 hours in advance. The criteria can vary from place to place. For example, the potential for six inches or more of snow is usually the threshold for issuing a winter storm watch in Boston, but it would take much less to trigger a watch in southern states.



#### Winter storm warning:

Issued when a winter storm is producing or is forecast to produce heavy snow or significant ice accumulations. As with a watch, the criteria can vary from place to place.



#### Blizzard warning:

Issued for winter storms with sustained or frequent winds of 35 mph or higher with considerable falling and/or blowing snow that frequently reduces visibility to 1/4 of a mile or less. These conditions are expected to last for at least three hours.

Source: [National Weather Service](#)



# Winter Storms: 'Deceptive Killers' Can Cause Big Business Impacts

A winter storm can significantly impact (and possibly suspend) business operations due to snow, ice, freezing rain and high wind. Having a winter weather preparedness plan in place could make the difference between keeping your business running with some disruptions or shutting down altogether.

The aftermath of a major winter weather event can affect a community for days, weeks or even months. Heavy snow, extremely cold temperatures and coastal flooding may lead to hazardous conditions, even in areas accustomed to winter storms.

One of the big concerns for businesses is a winter storm's ability to knock out power, heat and communication at offices, sometimes for several days. In addition, snow-packed and icy roads can make it difficult (if not impossible) for employees to get to the office.

There's a reason the National Weather Service calls winter storms "deceptive killers" – many injuries and deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Some of the dangers include:

- Exposure due to the cold
- Fires related to improper heater usage
- Vehicle accidents
- Becoming trapped at home or in a car

Cold weather threats, such as hypothermia and frostbite, can lead to loss of fingers or toes. In severe cases, they could result in permanent kidney, pancreas and liver damage, or even death.

## Injuries Related To Cold



- 50% happen to people over 60 years old
- More than 75% happen to males
- About 20% occur in the home

Source: [NOAA](#)

## Injuries Due To Ice And Snow



- About 70% result from vehicle accidents
- About 25% occur in people caught out in a storm
- Most happen to males over 40 years old

Source: [NOAA](#)



## 5 Tips To Prepare Your Business For A Winter Storm

Organizations have tremendous influence on employees when it comes to preparing for a disaster. According to FEMA research, **“When employers encourage employees to be prepared for disasters, employees are 75% more likely to take action.”**

Use these five tips to help your organization and employees get ready for winter storms:

“When employers encourage employees to be prepared for disasters, employees are 75% more likely to take action.”

### **1 Discuss When It's OK For Employees To Stay Home**

Road conditions during winter storms can be extremely dangerous. About 70% of injuries due to snow and ice result from vehicle accidents, so help your employees stay off the roads when winter weather is predicted.

In the event of a major winter storm, even if the office is open, it's best when possible to give employees the choice to come to work or stay at home. Show employees that you care about their safety and trust their judgment as to whether road conditions are safe.

Keep in mind the impact a snowstorm has varies by location. Places that regularly experience snow are better equipped to handle it. For instance, a few inches of snow is more likely to cause dangerous road conditions and disruptions in Dallas than in Denver. Consider setting criteria for snowfall, temperatures and road conditions that could trigger a winter weather day at your office.

Plan in advance for how you'll notify employees about days where they have the option to stay at home (or must due to an office closure). **An emergency notification system (ENS) is a valuable tool for sending notifications across multiple channels, including email, text, voice, fax and mobile.**



Also, decide how you'll handle the time off if an employee decides to stay at home and can't work remotely. Will the hours be deducted from their PTO pool or count as a sick day? Check your state and federal regulations around paying employees during bad weather scenarios, and communicate policies to employees before a winter storm hits.

## **2 Develop A Remote Working Plan**

The core goal of a winter weather preparedness plan is to keep your employees safe and maintain productivity. Remote working represents a great way to accomplish both.

Even if employees can make it to the office, it's probably going to take them longer. Driving during a snowstorm is stressful and time-consuming. In addition, parents may not be able to come to work if schools or daycare facilities are closed.

Consult with your organization's leadership team to make decisions around remote working. You'll want to consider the kind of projects best suited for remote work, such as writing reports, doing competitor research or programming code.

**All employees working remotely should have web-based access to their work files.** It's also helpful if they're able to communicate via video or audio conferencing.

To maximize productivity, have your employees practice connecting to your company's network remotely before a winter weather day, so they can work out any issues in advance. They should also keep devices fully charged at all times during a winter storm, in case the power goes out at home.



### 3 Help Employees Create Winter Kits

Every employee should create an emergency supply kit for their car and home. Building a kit is easy and inexpensive. In many cases, people will already have needed items at home. If not, they're readily available at most grocery stores, pharmacies and hardware stores.

Before the winter weather season sets in, cars need a thorough check to make sure key components are safely working, including the antifreeze levels, brakes, heater and defroster, and windshield wiper equipment.

Don't forget to check the tires. **Whether you're using winter tires or all-season tires, proper tire tread is critical for safely driving in snowy conditions.** You can check your tread using the quarter test. Insert a quarter into the tire tread upside down, with Washington's head going in first. If the top of his head is visible at any point around the tire, your tread is low and you should consider getting new tires.

Once your vehicle is safe for driving in winter weather, store an emergency supply kit inside the car with these items in case you get stranded:



- Jumper cables
- Sand
- Flashlight
- Warm clothes and blankets
- Bottled water and non-perishable snacks

At home, employees should keep a basic emergency supply kit that includes a gallon of water for each person per day for at least three days, a three-day supply of non-perishable food, a first aid kit, extra batteries and a manual can opener for food. Also plan for each person's specific needs, such as medication.



#### **4 Do Winter Weather Preparedness Training**

Help your employees stay safe when a winter storm threatens by providing some training on how to survive during an emergency. Ideally, they should stay indoors and dress warmly, using generators as needed but outside only and away from windows.

**If stuck in your car during a snowstorm, it's usually best to stay put.** To conserve gas, only turn the car on periodically to warm it up, and ensure the exterior exhaust is clear of snow so carbon monoxide doesn't build up in the car. Put on your hazard lights or use roadside flares to alert other drivers and potential rescuers.

Remind employees to always let someone know their destination, their route and when they expect to arrive. If their car gets stuck, help can be sent along their predetermined route. Don't rely on having cell phone coverage, especially during a storm. However, text messages are more likely to get through during a network disruption than voice calls.

Emphasize the need to be ready to stay at home for at least three days without power, water or heat. Insulating a home with storm windows or covering windows with plastic on the inside helps keep cold air out.

When using alternate sources for electricity, heating or cooking, be careful to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock and fire. **Generators and camp stoves should never be used inside.** Stress the importance of having carbon monoxide detectors at every level of the house to provide early warning of any buildup.



## **5 Conduct Equipment Checks At Work**

Make sure your office is ready for winter by insulating walls, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and maintaining heating equipment.

Remove tree branches that could fall on structures (this is critical in case a storm delivers wet, heavy snow). Repair roof leaks, and have a contractor check the structural ability of the roof if heavy snow accumulates.

**Ensure all fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside and kept clear.** While fire extinguishers should always be on hand, it's particularly important during winter, when fires sparked by heating sources are more common.

Also, stock up on these winter weather supplies, so you're not caught unprepared when a storm hits:



- Rock salt (or similar products) to melt ice on walkways
- Snow shovels and/or snowblowers to remove snow
- Sand to improve traction in parking lots
- Traction mats in entryways to soak up snow, salt and dirt

Stores sometimes sell out of common supplies in the days leading up to a storm, so don't wait until a storm is forecasted to gather them.



## Create A Culture Of Preparedness At Your Organization

By the time a winter storm is forecasted to affect your area, it's too late to get your organization ready without a winter weather preparedness plan already in place. You typically only have a few days' notice before a storm strikes.

Educating your employees helps them be better prepared for winter storms, and in turn creates a culture of preparedness that benefits the entire organization. When employees know how to stay safe – and see that the business leaders care about their safety – they're better equipped to maintain productivity during challenging winter weather.



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