

Winter Storm Emergency Preparedness

Provided by Arbury Insurance Agency

Severe winter storms can bring heavy snow, ice, strong winds, and freezing rain. Winter storms can prevent employees and customers from reaching the workplace, leading to a temporary shutdown until roads are cleared. Heavy snow and ice can also cause power outages or structural damage.

Businesses should have a written plan for preparing for winter storms. There should also be a monitoring plan using a weather monitoring service that provides timely updates. The following are considerations when developing the plan:

Know Winter Storm Terminology

It is important to understand the terms related to winter emergencies. The following terms may be used by emergency managers, weather forecasters, and emergency response personnel to describe the type of event predicted. Important terms include:

Winter Storm Watch. Severe winter weather is possible. Tune in to monitor weather reports for more information.

Winter Storm Warning. Severe winter weather is expected. Begin preparing for the emergency, notify your phone tree, and activate plans so that when snow falls, walkways and parking lots have been treated with anti-icing agents.

Blizzard Warning. Severe winter weather with sustained winds of at least 35 mph or greater is expected and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.

Traveler's Advisory. Severe winter conditions may make driving difficult or dangerous. Exercise caution when traveling and pay attention to travel advisories. Expect travel delays, and determine alternate routes or cancel travel plans altogether.

Utilize Monitoring Services

The National Weather Service (NWS) offers various technologies to disseminate climate, water, and weather information. As an integral part of its mission, the NWS recognizes the need to provide the emergency management community with access to a set of NWS warnings, watches, forecasts, and other products at no recurring cost. Toward that end, the Emergency Manager Weather Information Network (EMWIN) system was developed.

Timely access using automatic push or pull technology to provide weather information is provided through NWS systems, including:

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio (NWR), <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/disemsys.shtml#NWR>
- NOAA Weather Wire Service (NWWS), <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/disemsys.shtml#NWWS>
- Emergency Manager Weather Information Network (EMWIN), <http://www.weather.gov/emwin/EMWIN-N-FAQ.htm>
- NWS Home Page, <http://www.weather.gov/>

Develop a Winter Storm Preparedness Plan

Your business should have a written plan for preparing for winter storms. There should also be a monitoring plan using a weather monitoring service that provides timely updates. The following are considerations when developing the plan:

Before the Storm

- Purchase NWR with a warning alarm tone and battery backup to get current information on approaching storms.
- Establish facility shutdown procedures and warning and evacuation procedures.
- Mark outside utility, fire protection, and drainage area to facilitate snow removal.
- Purchase anti-skid, ice melt, or similar products to maintain walkways.
- Install backup systems as necessary, such as alternate power sources (e.g., generators or gasoline-powered pumps), and battery-powered emergency lighting.
- Have a structural engineer or architect evaluate the roof assembly to determine the maximum snow load.
- Identify qualified contractors for both ground and roof snow removal.

During the Storm

- Have someone assigned to monitor NWR or the local news for the latest storm updates.
- Establish a fire watch, in the event that the fixed protection is compromised during the storm.
- Ensure that someone monitors equipment or processes that must remain on during a storm.
- Have a plan for shutting down electric equipment during a power interruption to reduce start-up loading.
- Remove snow from roofs before the snow load capacity is exceeded.
- Remove snow from around roof drains and downspout discharge areas.
- Have utility, fire protection, and walkways cleaned frequently to maintain access.

After the Storm

- Continue snow removal activities, as needed.
- Monitor the roof for leaks as snow melts.
- Clean around roof drains and downspouts.
- Document damage to property, including taking photographs or video.
- Initiate emergency repairs to provide temporary securement of the property from further damage.