

# WINTER STORMS

Winter storms affect communities in many ways. Snow, ice, and freezing rain produce dangerous driving conditions. Extreme cold and strong winds cause frostbite and hypothermia. Rapid accumulation of heavy snow can damage buildings and important infrastructure for communications, and cause power outages. In coastal areas, flooding and beach erosion are of major concern. Ice-jammed rivers and sudden thawing of snow can cause serious flood damage in other landscapes as well.

As with all natural hazards, the impacts of winter storms can be lessened by understanding the risks and being prepared to respond appropriately. The Congressional Hazards Caucus Alliance encourages all citizens to learn more about winter storms. Information on this factsheet comes from several federal and state disaster preparedness and response agencies listed on the flip side.



NOAA weather satellite image of 1991 "Halloween" storm described in the book and movie *The Perfect Storm*. The storm was at its peak intensity in this image. The storm caused severe and widespread beach erosion and coastal flooding along the entire US east coast, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

## What You Can Do To Prepare

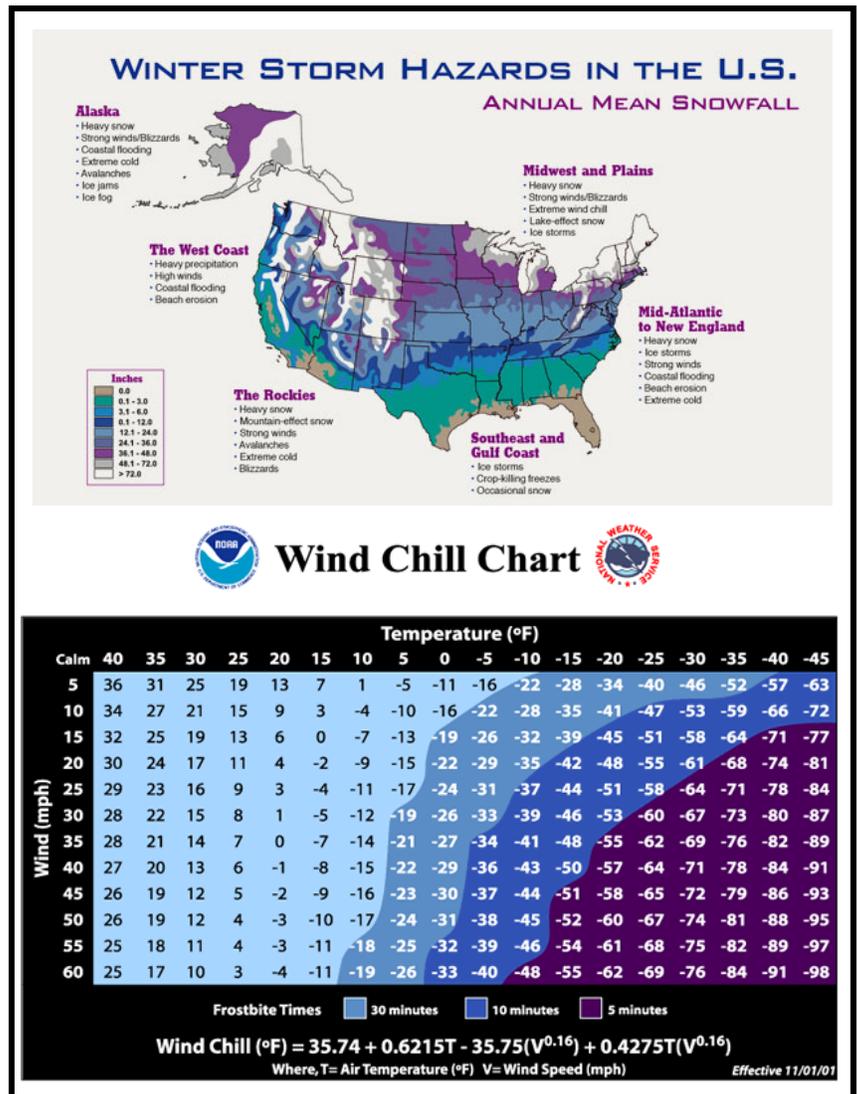
- ◆ Equip your home and car with emergency kits. Basics include a portable radio, flashlight, extra batteries, first aid kit and manual, prescription medications, waterproof matches, non-perishable food, water, and a signal flare. For a winter storm, also include extra warm clothing and blankets, snow boots, snow shovel, tow chain or rope, booster cables, fluorescent distress flag, and road sand/salt.
- ◆ Get a special radio that receives NOAA's Weather Radio All Hazards broadcasts. The National Weather Service recommends purchasing a radio that meets the Public Alert Standard. (Look for the Public Alert logo shown at right.) These radios automatically turn on if a weather warning or watch is issued for your area. For more information about Weather Radio receivers, go to: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/nwrrcvr.htm>.
- ◆ Know the winter storm hazard lingo. A winter storm watch means that conditions are right for a storm to strike in 12 to 36 hours. A winter storm warning indicates a storm is imminent or already occurring, and is a threat to life and property. A blizzard warning forecasts blinding, wind-driven snow and dangerous wind chills. Shelter should be sought immediately.
- ◆ Learn about winter storm risks facing your area and develop a winter storm specific Family Disaster Plan. Discuss with your family what to do if a winter storm watch or warning is issued.
- ◆ Understand wind chill hazards. Wind carries heat away from a person's body, dropping the core temperature. Temperatures just below freezing combined with strong winds can have the same effects as a still air temperature of about 35 degrees colder.
- ◆ Take an American Red Cross course to learn how to treat cold exposure, frostbite, and hypothermia.





## Winter Storm Facts

- ◆ The leading cause of death in winter storms is from automobile or other transportation accidents. In general, 70 percent of winter deaths related to snow and ice occur in automobiles. Other likely causes of death are exhaustion and heart attacks caused by over-exertion.
- ◆ House fires occur more frequently in winter due to lack of proper safety precautions when using alternative heat sources, such as fireplaces, space heaters, and generators. Frozen pipes can slow the ability of fire departments to respond to blazes.
- ◆ In the 10 years between 1996 and 2006 winter weather caused 454 U.S. fatalities, 2,794 injuries and \$6.4 billion dollars in damage.
- ◆ Ice storms that struck New England in 1998 caused tremendous damage, leaving many people without power for days or even weeks. For Maine alone, total costs were \$320 million.
- ◆ A major winter storm in a heavily populated region can have significant negative impacts on the overall economy as measured by the GNP and unemployment statistics. As a result, major industries (such as the airline industry) now take steps based on more accurate weather forecasts to mitigate these impacts.



## Winter Storm Information and Disaster Preparedness Resources

- ◆ **National Weather Service**  
[www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)
- ◆ **Federal Emergency Management Agency**  
[www.fema.gov/hazard/winter](http://www.fema.gov/hazard/winter)
- ◆ **American Red Cross Disaster Services**  
[www.redcross.org/](http://www.redcross.org/)
- ◆ **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**  
[www.ready.gov/america](http://www.ready.gov/america)

The **Congressional Hazards Caucus** is co-chaired by Senators Mary Landrieu (LA) , Ben Nelson (NE) , and Lisa Murkowski (AK) and Representatives Dennis Moore (KS), Jo Bonner (AL) and Zoe Lofgren (CA). The Caucus helps individuals, businesses, and communities better prepare for and mitigate the costs of disasters. The Caucus seeks to foster dialogue on steps that government and citizens can take to lessen the severity of these disasters. To learn more about the Caucus, visit [www.hazardscaucus.org](http://www.hazardscaucus.org).