

# WINTER STORMS AND YOUR BUSINESS

Natural Disasters



Severe winter weather can lead to property damage, employee illness or injury, and possible business closures. Preparing before the storm can help you protect your employees, minimize damage and recover quicker following a winter storm situation.

## Before a Winter Storm

- **Stay informed.**
  - Monitor for severe winter weather in your area at the NOAA National Weather Service. <http://www.weather.gov/>
- **Know the terminology.**
  - **Winter Storm Watch:** Severe winter conditions, such a heavy snow and/or ice, are possible for your area in the next 12 to 36 hours. Prepare now!
  - **Winter Storm Warning:** Severe winter conditions are expected in the next 12-24 hours; 4-6 inches of snow or sleet, or 1/4 inch or more of ice is expected. Seek shelter immediately!
  - **Blizzard Warning:** Snow and strong winds (gusts up to 35 mph or greater) will combine to produce a blinding snow (near zero visibility), deep drifts, and life threatening wind chill; expected to occur for three hours or longer.
- **Stockpile emergency materials.**
  - Standby electric generator for emergency power
  - Sandbags, shovel, road salt or ice melt
- **Establish shelter locations on your property.**
  - There should be enough room for all employees, any customers or suppliers who may be at your business during the hazardous situation.
  - Stock the shelter with emergency supplies (e.g., flashlights, battery powered radio, first aid kit, food, water, and blankets).
- **Make plans regarding customers.**
  - Determine the likelihood of customers being present if a severe storm situation.
  - Have an emergency plan for customers; review it with employees regularly.
- **Have a business emergency/continuity plan**
  - Be prepared for power outages that often accompany severe weather.
  - Determine any essential equipment or processes that rely on electrical power.
  - Have emergency power (e.g., backup generators) available for these items.
  - Maintain an inventory of all equipment and assets for your business in the event of structural damage.
  - Install surge protectors to protect electronic equipment.

- **Determine a back-up heating source in case the power goes out.**
  - Use heating sources only in a well ventilated room to avoid build up of lethal carbon monoxide gas.
  - Keep a fire extinguisher close by.
- **Install a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated.**
  - Test them monthly.
  - Replace batteries twice yearly.
- **If employees work outdoors,**
  - Schedule work during the morning and late-afternoon hours, if possible.
  - Avoid strenuous activities outdoors.
  - Postpone nonessential tasks.

## During a Winter Storm

- **Stay informed.**
  - Listen to local news and weather channels for situation developments and road closures.
- **Ensure employee and customer safety.**
- **Stay safe while indoors.**
- **If backup power supplies are needed,**
  - Never use an electric generator indoors, inside the garage, or near the air intake of your home because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
  - Do not store gasoline indoors where the fumes could ignite.
  - Use individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords to plug in other appliances.

## After a Winter Storm

- **Clear away the snow safely.**
  - Avoid overexertion. Strain from the cold and the hard labor can lead to a heart attack - a major cause of death in the winter.
  - Pace yourself, work slowly, and rest frequently.
  - Make sure you have good footing when lifting the snow shovel.
- **Assess the situation.**
  - Make sure heating systems and water pipes are working.
  - Look for any damage that may have occurred to your home.
- **Account for your inventory.**
  - Check buildings for damage (e.g., downed power lines or trees, accumulated snow or ice).

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