

WINTER TERMINOLOGY

The National Weather Service uses specific terminology to describe winter weather events. Understanding the definitions is important, so that you know what to do during different circumstances. Remember these terms, because the next time you hear them, your life and the lives of others may depend upon it!

WINTER STORM OUTLOOK: Significant winter weather may develop in a few days. This should not be considered a statement that severe weather conditions will definitely occur, but should be used to alert you that these may develop in 3 to 5 days. The outlook is intended to assist those people that need considerable lead time to prepare for the event, such as ranchers, store owners, and outdoor workers.

WINTER STORM WATCH: Adverse winter weather (heavy snow, blizzard) is possible within the next two days, but the exact timing, location, or occurrence of the storm is still uncertain. A watch means to get prepared for a storm.

WINTER STORM WARNING: Hazardous winter weather is likely. If not already occurring, there is a higher probability that the storm will occur. Travel may become impossible. You should be ready for a storm by this time.

BLIZZARD WARNING: The most dangerous of all winter weather will occur in your area: a combination of winds 35 mph or greater and significant snow and/or blowing snow with visibility less than 1/4 mile for three or more hours. Blinding snow (near zero visibility), deep drifts, and life threatening wind chill will occur. You should seek refuge immediately!

HIGH WIND WARNING: Hazardous winds are occurring or will soon occur across a significant area. Travel during high wind event can be downright dangerous, especially for high-profile vehicles.

For elevations below 7500 feet:
Sustained winds of 40 mph or greater OR
Gusts to 60 mph or more

In higher elevations:
Sustained winds of 50 mph OR
gusts to at least 70 mph

WIND CHILL WARNING: Issued when wind chills of 50 below zero or colder, with winds of at least 10 mph, are occurring or imminent. A **WIND CHILL ADVISORY** is issued when wind chills of minus 30 to minus 50 are expected.

HEAVY SNOW WARNING:

At lower elevations, snowfall totaling:
6 inches or more in 12 hours OR
8 inches or more in 24 hours

In the mountains, snowfall totaling:
8 inches or more in 12 hours OR
10 inches or more in 24 hours

WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY: Weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. If caution is exercised, however, these situations should not become life-threatening. The greatest hazard is often to motorists. Examples of conditions for which advisories are issued include snow, blowing snow, frost, freezing drizzle, and dangerous wind chill.

SNOW ADVISORY:

In non-mountain areas:
3 to 5 inches of snow in 12 hours OR
5 to 8 inches of snow in 24 hours

In the mountains:
5 to 8 inches of snow in 12 hours OR
8 to 10 inches of snow in 24 hours

BLOWING SNOW: Wind driven snow that reduces visibility and causes significant drifting. Blowing snow is a hazard that may even occur on clear days when loose snow on the ground is picked up by the wind.

SLEET: Rain drops that freeze into ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects. However, it can accumulate like snow and cause a hazard to motorists.

FREEZING RAIN AND FREEZING DRIZZLE: Precipitation that freezes as it strikes the ground and/or other surfaces, such as trees, power lines, and cars, forming a coating or glazing of ice.