

Preparing for and Responding to a Winterstorm



A winter storm is an event in which the main types of precipitation are snow, sleet or freezing rain. They can be dangerous and life-threatening because of the heavy snowfalls and severe cold that creates hazardous driving and walking conditions.

Before Cold Weather Arrives:

- Develop procedures for when you lose heat and/or electricity.
- Identify equipment, processes and piping that contain or use water or other liquid that is subject to freezing. Promptly and thoroughly drain them if heat or electricity is lost.
- Identify equipment that is vulnerable to freezing. Prepare the equipment for cold weather by draining and securing any idle equipment, draining condensate frequently and providing heat or relocating the equipment in a heated enclosure and/or providing anti-freeze.
- Service the heating system before winter begins. Make sure adequate supplies of fuel are on hand.
- Inspect and maintain the building shell to minimize openings. Fix windows and doors to close tightly. Caulk, insulate and weather-strip doors. Close and seal dampers, louvers, and vents.
- Have all vehicles winterized before the winter storm season to decrease the chance of employees being stranded in cold weather.
- All vehicles should have good winter tires with adequate tread. All-weather radials can be adequate, but some jurisdictions require vehicles to be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.
- Vehicles should be equipped with a windshield scraper and small broom.
- Keep a small sack of sand in the vehicles for generating traction under wheels.
- Service snow removal equipment before the winter storm season and maintain it in good working order.
- Determine the maximum “safe” snow depth for the roof based on the roof’s live load capacity (usually indicated by building plans and specifications or by engineering analysis of the roof design) and the properties of accumulated snow for the area.
- Inspect the roof structure for damage or deterioration and repair or reinforce as needed.
- Inspect roof drains and downspouts. Clean accumulated debris to prevent clogging of the drainage system.
- Look for water ponding on the roof and eliminate the causes.
- If appropriate, establish a relationship with a qualified third party to maintain snow and ice removal during inclement weather.

Preparation for a Winter Storm Should Include:

- Filling all vehicle gas tanks to help prevent fuel lines from freezing.
- Stocking up on products to melt ice on walkways.
- Ensuring adequate lighting for doorways, parking lots, walkways and other working surfaces.
- Providing adequate floor matting at door entrances to minimize debris and wet or slippery walking conditions.
- Protecting pipes from freezing.
- Listening for the latest information and updates on local area radio or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
- Checking and replenishing emergency supplies as needed.

During and After the Storm:

- Regularly monitor snow depth on the roof, especially areas where snow tends to drift.
- Remove snow accumulations from the roof before the snow reaches 50 percent of the “safe” maximum depth. Ideally, snow should be removed during a storm only if the forecast indicates that the total snowfall will result in dangerous accumulations. See OSHA guidelines for snow removal safety. (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA-3513roof-snow-hazard.pdf>)
- Remove snow in layers uniformly across the roof to prevent unbalanced loads that might cause a collapse. Avoid making snow piles on the roof during the removal process.
- Clear snow and ice from storm drains and catch basins. Check the roof drainage system to make sure that it is not clogged with ice or debris.
- Inspect the property at regular intervals to identify and address slippery walking conditions. Inspections include indoor maintenance of effective walk off mats, wet floor signage, and proper wet floor clean up. Outdoor inspections should include removal of snow and ice on main pedestrian paths and driving surfaces.
- Prevent roof cover damage by using care with snow removal equipment (shovels, etc.). It is not necessary to clean completely to the roof surface if melting snow and water can freely flow to drains.
- If it is necessary for your employees to be outside in severe weather conditions, ensure they are wearing proper uniforms, footwear and that communication methods are operable. Check on their condition often.
- If necessary for your employees to drive, require that they prepare the vehicle with ice scraper and other tools. Check tire pressure, windshield wipers are functioning and clear, ensure the gas tank is full and the cell phone properly charged. Drive at reduced speeds and exercise caution.
- Most freeze-ups to wet pipe sprinkler systems are a result from failure to provide adequate heat. Maintain extra heat during periods of extreme cold to keep the sprinkler piping from freezing. Check room temperatures frequently, especially if near 40 degrees Fahrenheit. If you need to drain the system, fire protection afforded by sprinklers is no longer available. Curtail all hazardous operations during this period. Post a continuous fire watch with fire-fighting equipment and a way to summon help. Do not use open flames or torches for thawing frozen water pipes near combustibles or buildings.
- Dry pipe systems generally freeze due to water collecting in improperly pitched pipes, failure to remove accumulated water from low point drains, or failure to drain the system properly after the valve has tripped. Repair, replace or refasten broken, missing or loose pipe hangers for proper pitch of sprinkler piping and good drainage.

To learn more about Winter Storm preparedness contact your McGriff Broker.



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