

Severe Winter Weather Preparedness Advisory

Practical Considerations for Local Businesses

Issued: January 2026

Forecast: 16-24 inches snow + accumulating ice



Situation Overview

Current forecasts indicate a significant winter weather event beginning Saturday and continuing through Monday, with **16-24 inches of snow possible**, followed by the potential for **accumulating ice**. While forecast details may change, this combination of heavy snow and ice historically creates **longer-lasting operational impacts** than snow alone.

Why This Advisory Matters

This advisory is intended to help local businesses think through **practical preparedness and decision considerations** ahead of the weekend. The multi-day nature of this event and the combination of snow followed by ice requires different planning than typical winter weather.

Key Timing Considerations

- Event Start: Saturday morning
- Heavy Snow Period: Saturday through Sunday
- Ice Potential: Sunday night into Monday
- Recovery Period: May extend beyond precipitation end

The information provided here is designed to support business decision-making, not to replace official weather forecasts or emergency management guidance. Businesses should continue monitoring local forecasts and adjust plans as conditions evolve.

Why This Event May Be Operationally Different

Not all winter storms create the same business impacts. The forecast combination of heavy snow followed by ice accumulation presents distinct challenges that businesses should understand when planning their response.

Multi-Day Impact Factors

- **Extended disruption window:** Snow followed by ice increases the likelihood that disruptions persist after precipitation ends
- **Utility vulnerability:** Ice accumulation raises the potential for tree damage and power outages
- **Access complications:** Secondary roads, parking areas, and loading zones may remain unsafe even after primary roads are cleared
- **Recovery uncertainty:** Reopening timelines may depend on utilities, access, and safety—not just snowfall totals

Historical Context

Past winter events combining significant snow and ice have typically resulted in:

- Power restoration periods extending 24-72 hours or longer in affected areas
- Business closures lasting 2-4 days beyond the end of precipitation
- Secondary road clearing delayed 48+ hours after main routes reopen
- Employee commuting challenges persisting through refreeze cycles

These patterns don't guarantee similar outcomes, but they inform realistic planning assumptions for businesses preparing for weekend operations.

Decisions to Consider Before Saturday

Businesses may wish to clarify these items in advance rather than making decisions during the storm when information flow may be disrupted and conditions are changing rapidly.

Operating Posture Decisions

- Closure vs. limited operations thresholds
- Conditions required for reopening safely
- Decision-making authority and communication chain
- Criteria for changing status once announced



Workforce Planning

- Remote work options where feasible
- Clear guidance discouraging unsafe travel
- Pay and leave policies for closure periods
- Essential personnel identification and support

Communication and Customer Service

Customer Communications

- How closures, delays, or reduced hours will be communicated
- Messaging channels and update frequency
- Avoiding commitments to specific reopening times
- Managing customer expectations about service resumption

Critical Dependencies

- Operations that cannot function without power, heat, or internet
- Vendor and supplier contingencies
- Payment processing backup options
- Inventory that requires climate control

Facilities and Asset Protection Considerations

Heavy snow and ice often expose overlooked vulnerabilities in business facilities. Advance attention to these areas can prevent costly damage and enable faster recovery.



Power and Heat Systems

Understand what backup power can realistically support and for how long. Plan for cold weather exposure during outages. Identify critical systems that must remain operational.



Pipes and Water Systems

Maintain heat where possible. Identify areas vulnerable to freezing. Know your water shut-off locations. Consider pipe insulation for exposed areas.



Fire Protection Systems

Ensure sprinkler and alarm systems are protected from freezing conditions. Maintain minimum temperatures in all areas with fire protection infrastructure.



Roof and Exterior

Monitor snow load where feasible. Restrict access beneath overhangs and gutters where ice may fall. Clear critical drainage areas before the storm.

Facility Preparedness Actions

Consider these steps before Saturday:

- Test backup power systems and verify fuel levels
- Ensure thermostats are set appropriately and backup heating options are available
- Protect exposed pipes with insulation or heat tape
- Clear roof drains and gutters of debris
- Stock sand, salt, or ice melt for walkways and entrances
- Verify emergency contact information for utilities and contractors

Workforce Safety and Expectations

Employee safety is often the limiting factor in winter events. Clear guidance and consistent messaging help protect staff while maintaining reasonable operational expectations.

Avoid Travel Assumptions

Plowed main roads do not guarantee safe commuting. Secondary roads, parking lots, and walkways often remain hazardous long after primary routes are cleared. Ice creates particular risks during warming and refreezing cycles.



Encourage Conservative Decisions

Explicitly encourage employees to make conservative decisions about commuting during and after the event. Individual circumstances (vehicle type, road conditions, physical ability) vary significantly. Employee judgment should be supported, not overridden.



Consider Staggered Reopening

Rather than fixed reopening times, consider conditions-based reopening that allows flexibility as situations evolve. This reduces pressure on employees to travel in marginal conditions and avoids the disruption of reopening prematurely.



Ensure Consistent Guidance

Supervisors and managers should have consistent guidance to avoid mixed messages about expectations. Clarify ahead of time what "weather closure" means for different employee categories and how decisions will be communicated.



Supporting Employee Safety

Practical steps businesses can take:

- Communicate closure or delayed opening decisions early—not at normal start times
- Avoid penalizing employees for weather-related absences during hazardous conditions
- Provide clear guidance on pay and leave policies during weather events
- Check on employees who live alone or in vulnerable situations
- Consider shelter-in-place options for essential personnel

Common Issues and What to Avoid

Experience with past snow and ice events reveals recurring challenges that businesses can anticipate and plan around.

Common Issues in Snow + Ice Events

Businesses frequently encounter:

- Reopening too early, then closing again due to refreeze or outages
- Underestimating the duration of power restoration
- Focusing on snowfall totals while overlooking ice impacts
- Pressuring staff to return before conditions are stable
- Inadequate communication leading to customer frustration

What Not to Overdo

Avoid these common missteps:

- Committing publicly to reopening times that may change
- Unnecessary on-site presence during peak impact periods
- Assuming conditions normalize immediately after precipitation ends
- Making closure decisions at the last minute
- Neglecting to communicate with employees about expectations

Recovery Considerations

Plan for the recovery phase:

- Budget extra time for facility preparation before reopening
- Expect reduced customer traffic initially as conditions remain challenging
- Monitor refreeze cycles that may create new hazards
- Document damage and expenses for insurance purposes
- Coordinate with vendors on delayed deliveries and restocking

Closing Note

Preparedness actions taken now can reduce disruption, protect facilities, and support employee safety regardless of how the forecast ultimately evolves. Even if impacts are less severe than predicted, these steps generally support smoother winter operations.

This event presents challenges, but also an opportunity for businesses to demonstrate operational resilience and commitment to employee and customer safety. The decisions made in the next 24-48 hours will shape outcomes through early next week.

Key principle: Make deliberate decisions based on realistic assumptions rather than optimistic scenarios. Plan for conditions to be worse and last longer than initial forecasts suggest.

Essential Preparation Checklist

- Clarify closure and reopening decision criteria
- Communicate workforce expectations and policies
- Test backup power and heating systems
- Protect pipes and critical infrastructure
- Stock facility supplies (salt, flashlights, batteries)
- Verify emergency contact information
- Prepare customer communication messages
- Document current facility conditions

Monitor and Adjust

Businesses are encouraged to monitor local forecasts and public safety guidance and to make decisions appropriate to their specific operations and risk tolerance. Conditions may change, and flexibility in planning allows better response as the event unfolds.

The combination of heavy snow and ice creates operational complexity beyond typical winter weather. Businesses that plan realistically, communicate clearly, and prioritize safety will be best positioned to weather this event and resume normal operations when conditions allow.

Key Resources

- Local National Weather Service forecast office for updated predictions
- County emergency management for road conditions and utility information
- State department of transportation for highway status
- Local utility companies for outage reporting and restoration estimates