

## Winter Weather Safety & Terms

A winter storm occurs when there is significant precipitation and the temperature is low enough that precipitation forms as sleet or snow, or when rain turns to ice. A winter storm can range from freezing rain and ice, to moderate snowfall over a few hours, to a blizzard that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures.



### Key Winter Terms

**Freezing Rain** – Rain that freezes when it hits the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads, walkways, trees and power lines.

**Sleet** – Rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes moisture on roads to freeze and become slippery.

**Snow Squall** – An intense fall of accumulating snow, reducing visibility significantly and often accompanied by increased winds

**Wind Chill** – A measure of how cold people feel due to the combined effect of wind and cold temperatures. The [wind chill index](#) is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin.

**Blizzard** – Sustained winds or frequent gusts of 35 mph or more with snow and blowing snow, frequently reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile for three hours or more.

**Blowing Snow** – Wind-driven snow that reduces visibility. Blowing snow may be falling snow and/or snow on the ground picked up by the wind.

**Snow Showers** – Snow falling at varying intensities for brief periods of time. Some accumulation is possible.

**Flurries** – Light snow falling for short durations with little or no accumulation.

Local National Weather Service (NWS) offices are responsible for issuing winter storm warnings, watches and advisories to alert the public when dangerous winter conditions are expected. Each NWS office knows the local area and will issue weather warnings, watches or advisories based on local criteria. See image:

