



**DON'T BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD**

# Preparing Your Business for Winter



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# Is Your Business Prepared for Winter?

**Winter may conjure up imagery suitable for a Norman Rockwell painting:** gently falling snow, cozy indoor gatherings, and a parade of holidays. But the cold, hard truth is that the business impact of winter weather is anything but idyllic.

The economic impact of a simple snowstorm can be upwards of \$1 billion.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), winter storms in the U.S. during the first half of 2021 alone resulted in more than \$20 billion of damages and 172 deaths.<sup>2</sup> And it's not just companies in the path of those epic nor'easters that need to take heed. The prolonged record cold in February 2021 left nearly 10 million people without power as far south as Texas.<sup>2</sup>

**During the first half of 2021 alone, U.S. winter storms resulted in more than**

**\$20 BILLION**

**in damages and**

**172 DEATHS**

Winter can take a toll on the physical and mental health of employees, which in turn impacts your business. In addition to typical winter-related illnesses and injuries, organizations also need to prepare for a potential winter surge of COVID-19 and increased employee stress due to the pandemic.



## 2021-2022 Winter Weather Predictions

NOAA is already predicting La Niña conditions this winter—meaning above-average temperatures in the South and West, and wetter-than-average conditions in the North and NorthWest similar to last year.<sup>3</sup> But even businesses in those warmer and drier areas should take their winter weather preparation seriously. The forecasts for La Niña are very similar to the 2020-2021 season, which saw the worst winter storm on record for parts of the South, including Texas. The time to make sure your business is prepared for winter weather is now.

**“Even if you’re in an area that is forecast to be warmer and drier than average, that certainly doesn’t rule out the possibility of significant winter weather impacts.”**

Jason Moreland, Senior Meteorologist at AlertMedia

In this eBook, we'll explore how winter is expected to impact businesses across the country, what businesses can do to prepare, and employee communication best practices for ensuring safety, productivity, and business continuity all winter long.

# The Impact of the Pandemic

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic paired with a challenging winter season poses a double threat to businesses everywhere. Annual winter hazards combined with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic present unique challenges organizations must take into account in their winter preparedness planning.

**Unique challenges presented by the pandemic that may require organizations to re-architect their winter weather preparation, communication, and response plans include:**

## 1 HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF REMOTE WORKERS

We have seen a massive shift to remote work over the last two years. Some organizations have announced they plan to shift permanently toward more remote work even after the pandemic ends. Virtual collaboration has become the new norm, and organizations now have to support many more remote workers than they needed to in the past.

**Many or even all of your employees may be working from home this winter.**

Most homes, however, lack the technology and infrastructure needed to stay up and running during a severe winter storm. Your remote workers' home office locations may be more vulnerable to unreliable connectivity or power interruptions during winter storms. IT failures are also much harder to fix when your entire workforce is working remotely.



## 2 HEIGHTENED EMPLOYEE WELLNESS RISKS

The novel coronavirus spreads easily through person-to-person contact in close quarters. During winter, when colder temperatures bring people into closer contact indoors, there is an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. Coupled with the flu and other seasonal illnesses, employees' health—vital to business continuity and performance—is at increased risk. Organizations will need to incorporate isolation procedures and quarantine scenarios into their emergency plans in the event of a COVID-19 exposure, infection, or outbreak amongst employees.



And it's not just employees' physical well-being that is at greater risk this winter. After nearly two years of working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees are feeling the effects of isolation in the form of depression, anxiety, and stress.

**Research shows that the pandemic has caused a surge in mental health and substance abuse issues, with at least 40 percent of Americans reporting struggling with mental health in a recent CDC survey.<sup>4</sup>**

With winter approaching, mental health experts also warn that more Americans will likely experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD)—also known as seasonal depression. Conducting regular employee wellness checks will be critical to ensuring all employees feel supported and have access to the mental health resources they need.



### 3 OVERWHELMED RESPONSE SYSTEMS

The pandemic has already put tremendous strain on typical response systems—disaster relief, healthcare, and government aid—and severe winter weather alongside a worrisome upcoming flu season<sup>5</sup> will only worsen that strain. Hospitals may already be at or near capacity with COVID-19 patients and flu patients when winter-related illnesses, accidents, or injuries occur. Federal and state disaster relief funds are limited. The influx of emergency personnel and resources we have seen in response to major storms in the past may simply not be an option. The low capacity of disaster recovery teams and healthcare systems will likely require businesses to mobilize help and step in to take care of local communities.

# How Winter Threatens Your Business

*There are many hazards businesses need to watch out for once the temperature begins to drop, and the potential impact of winter threats on both employees and the bottom line is significant.*



According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than 2,200 people are killed and 192,000 injured in vehicle crashes due to winter weather conditions each year.<sup>9</sup> And sadly, the demographic group with the highest death rates in winter accidents is middle-aged people, including employees on their way to or from work.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, an increased likelihood of workplace or home fires, slip and fall injuries, and higher rates of illness are just a few of the other lesser-thought-of but equally dangerous risks that most businesses, regardless of location, face when winter arrives. The flu, for example, affects businesses all across the country, reducing productivity, lowering staff morale, and disrupting business workflows. Even before the pandemic hit, two-thirds of U.S. businesses reported their company lost more than \$100,000 per year due to workplace-related illnesses.<sup>11</sup>

Winter storms can  
cause upwards of  
**\$3.5 BILLION**  
in damages annually.<sup>6</sup>

Extreme weather disrupts  
the operating and financial  
performance of  
**70 PERCENT**  
of businesses worldwide.<sup>7</sup>

More than  
**\$1 TRILLION**  
of the U.S. economy is  
weather-sensitive.<sup>8</sup>

There are also many ways winter weather can indirectly impact workforce productivity. Think about what happens to your employees' productivity when there are local school closures, fast-spreading illness within a community, or weather-related flight delays and cancellations that leave workers stranded in airports. You are forced to postpone meetings, delay emails, and push back projects. Missing core people from your team unexpectedly can disrupt your normal business operations.

# Preparing Your Business for Winter Weather

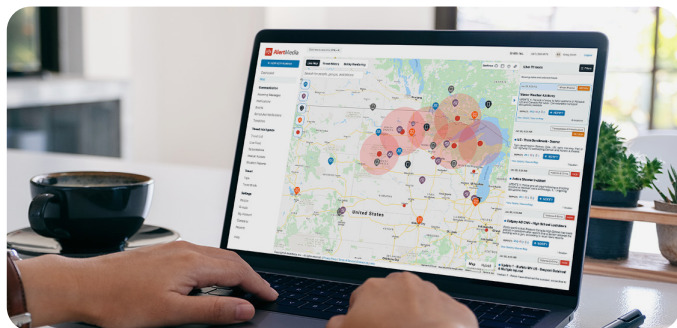
The good news is that the risks associated with winter weather can typically be foreseen and planned for, enabling you to mitigate or even eliminate the impact of those risks on your employees and your business. By taking a few simple steps to prepare your business for winter, you can prevent winter weather from leaving your business out in the cold.

**Here are three steps you can take to protect your business against winter's impact:**

## 1 ASSESS YOUR RISKS

The first step is to assess your organization's unique risks. Where your employees live, where your offices are located, what industry you operate in, and even how your employees work will all affect which risks pose the greatest danger to your people and business.

Winter weather threats can be especially difficult for organizations to prepare for because they are typically hyper-local, and seemingly similar storms can have drastically different impacts. By vigilantly checking the news and following travel safety recommendations, you can stay on top of the weather-related risks in your specific region. But what about traveling employees or remote workers? Or offices in other cities? With the modern, distributed workforce, it's not enough to track winter weather threats in one location—you need to be able to track the myriad of threats that could impact all of your dispersed employees.



**Here are just a few potential winter hazards to consider as you evaluate your specific risks:**

- COVID-19
- Unsafe driving conditions
- Road closures
- Slip and fall injuries
- Hypothermia and frostbite
- Flu and other seasonal illnesses
- Flight delays and cancellations
- Local school delays and closures
- Structural stress and damage
- Electrical and structural fires
- Power outages (both in the workplace and for employees working remotely)

Tracking such a wide array of threats manually is simply not feasible. For this reason, many companies rely on threat monitoring software to track these types of threats automatically, which allows them to focus on forming an action plan and communicating it to their employees in a timely fashion.

## 2 DETERMINE WHO'S RESPONSIBLE

When a snowstorm hits, who needs to ensure the office parking lot is safe and drivable? Who will track the storm and communicate weather-related updates to employees? The midst of a storm is not the time to figure out who is responsible for what. Organizations also need a detailed plan for how they will communicate with employees in the event of a local outbreak or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace.





Your organization is accountable for your employees' overall safety and well-being. To fulfill this duty of care, you must ensure all necessary safety precautions are taken—regardless of whether those precautionary measures are executed by your organization or a third party. Before winter comes, review your contracts with vendors, insurance providers, property managers, and landlords. There should be specific callouts for weather-related events. If not, contact the contract owners directly to determine contractual obligations and responsibilities.

Aside from outlining the responsibilities of all external parties, it's equally important to take a similar approach internally. From keeping employees informed of rapidly developing situations to ensuring all employees are accounted for to keeping facilities and equipment in safe operating condition, preparing your business for winter requires support from multiple internal functions. Assemble a project team of involved stakeholders—from departments such as HR, Facilities, Business Continuity, Emergency Operations, and IT—to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each function. This will help avoid confusion, finger-pointing, and missteps when it matters most.

### 3 MAKE A PLAN FOR EACH THREAT

Once you've identified your risks and determined who is responsible for completing each of the precautionary measures, create a specific action plan for each winter weather hazard you may encounter to eliminate ambiguity and keep everyone on the same page.

Develop a checklist of things that must be done before, during, and after a winter weather event. And, as part of that list of things to do before a winter storm, be sure to conduct regular inspections and maintenance of your offices, supplies, and equipment—from carbon monoxide detectors and elevators to walkways and evacuation routes. This will allow you to identify and obtain in advance any tools or materials needed to maintain them in good working order once the storm is at your doorstep.

And remember, preparing for winter weather shouldn't be done in a vacuum. It's great to have a plan—but even the best-laid plan falls short if your business leaders, managers, and employees aren't prepared as well. At a minimum, you should rehearse various winter weather scenarios with key leaders and people managers and train employees on the topic of winter safety.



***Learn How to Keep Your People  
and Business Safe This Winter***

**DOWNLOAD**



# Effective Communication During Winter Events

Just as important as physically preparing for the dangers associated with winter weather is having a plan for how—and with whom—you will communicate when winter weather hits.

Companies can't control the weather or even the winter hazards they may encounter. Still, every company can develop and implement a winter weather communications strategy that ensures employees know what to do when bad weather hits.

**By following these winter weather communication tips, you can keep your business running smoothly all season long:**

## 1 USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Email and phone trees are simply not enough to keep employees connected during winter weather. If you rely solely on these methods to communicate with employees and a bad snowstorm causes a widespread service outage in your area—as is often the case—many employees may never get the message. Fortunately, there are modern technologies designed to ensure critical messages reach people in the most efficient and reliable ways possible.

An emergency communication system is cloud-based software that enables the fast, reliable delivery of critical notifications to any size audience, on any device, over any communication channel. A modern emergency communication system—with features such as multichannel delivery, two-way communication, and live map tracking—can help you communicate weather-related updates to employees more effectively and mitigate the business impact of winter events.

And to communicate with remote workers, traveling employees, and personnel whose job may require them to be on the road or in the field even during winter weather conditions—like healthcare, transportation, or utility workers—a 24-hour emergency monitoring solution that combines a mobile app with an expert threat monitoring team can deliver even greater safety and security confidence.



## 2 KEEP CONTACT INFORMATION UPDATED

Keeping a distributed workforce safe and informed during winter weather is simply not possible with inaccurate employee contact information. It's vital to make sure employee data is current across all platforms—and that you always know where your employees plan to be working. This allows you to disseminate storm-related information and maintain contact with employees during winter weather events.

With accurate employee data, you can use an emergency communication system to send employee notifications quickly and easily across multiple channels—including voice calls, text messages, emails, and mobile app push notifications. And by importing travel data from your corporate travel management system into your emergency communication system, you can even automatically update your traveling employees' locations. This level of data accuracy allows you to segment your population to send messages only to the employees who need to receive them—such as those traveling in a particular region or based out of a specific office.

Aside from maintaining up-to-date employee data, it's also important to have accurate contact information on hand for third parties you may need to contact for the various action plans you've identified, such as your utility providers, landlord, and insurance company.

### 3 LEVERAGE NOTIFICATION TEMPLATES

During a winter storm or any other critical event, every minute spent struggling to custom craft messaging or building segmented employee lists represents lost time that delays your response and slows efforts to keep employees safe and informed. These things can, and should, be done well before the storm arrives.

Consider the different situations that may occur throughout a storm—such as power outages, office closures, and unsafe driving conditions—and what you need to convey to your audience during each of these scenarios.

Developing pre-built notification templates that address each of the situations you've identified will help you save time and ensure no important information is forgotten. Communication templates will also help you ensure the messaging is consistent; the last thing you want to do is send mixed messages that confuse an already chaotic situation.

AlertMedia Smith Inc. (561) 288-8078 GS Greg Smith Logout

< New Notification

**Templates** Manage

Search by name

Severe Weather

- Demonstrations
- IT
- Hurricane Response
- Email Trigger Templates
- IT
- Marketing
- HR
- ERT
- Quarterly Test
- General

**1 What type of notification is this?**

Notification Read Confirmation Survey Conference Call Escalation

**2 How would you like to send?**

Text App Voice Email WhatsApp

**3 What message do you want to send?**

Alert: Due to severe weather reports, the Chicago office will be closed on Friday the 18th. Please contact Victoria Martinez with questions and call into the emergency line for updates.

**4 Who do you want to send this to?**

Recipients New Filter Group Preview Recipients

Chicago Office

☐ Exclude Recipients

Cancel Save as Template Preview Schedule Send Now

#### TIP!

*Developing tailored communication templates can help you save time when winter weather hits and ensure that your message reaches the right people, in the right way, at the right time.*

Check out AlertMedia's winter weather communication templates for sample notifications you can use to keep employees informed via text messages, emails, voice calls, and even mobile app pushes.

DOWNLOAD





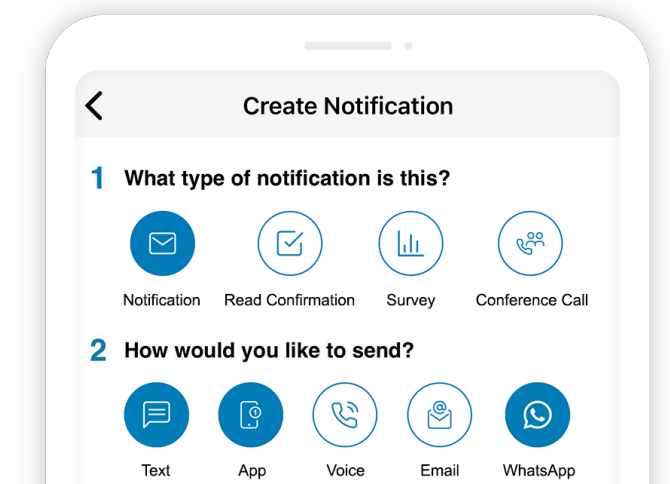
## 4 MONITOR THE WORLD AROUND YOU

As an office administrator or safety director, it may be up to you to determine whether traveling to and working out of your office location is safe and hazard-free. From storm-related outages to local COVID-19 outbreaks to dangerous driving conditions, it's vital to keep a pulse on all potential threats that could impact your people or locations. Don't assume your employees are watching the local news, and don't depend on hearsay, either.

The best way to monitor winter weather threats affecting your offices and remote workers is to use specialized threat monitoring software. Threat monitoring software cross-references a constantly updating global database of threats against your employees' locations. As soon as a threat emerges that could impact one or more of your employees—say, a blizzard starts to form that could affect two of your employees on a business trip in Chicago—the software will immediately send you a warning, describing the unfolding events and telling you which employees are impacted. You can even have the system automatically warn those people directly.

The best threat monitoring systems integrate with your emergency communication system—seamlessly bridging the gap between threat identification and threat response. Along with the warning, the software will give you the option to communicate that threat to the impacted employees.

**Instead of switching between systems, you can continue to monitor developing events and keep your people updated all under one platform.**



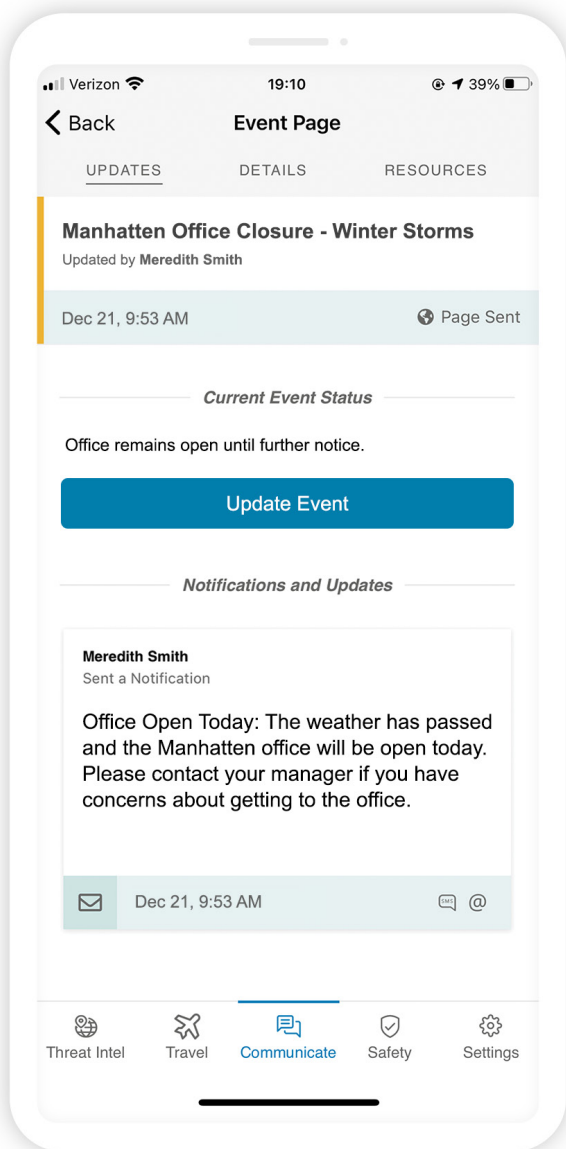
## 5 TIMING IS EVERYTHING

While the dangers associated with winter weather may be unpredictable, the winter weather season comes with plenty of notice. Ever wandered down the bread aisle at the grocery store in the days leading up to a snowstorm?

Fortunately, this means that businesses typically have the opportunity to get ahead of winter weather. Make sure you have protocols in place well ahead of the winter season. Communicate procedures and expectations to employees in advance. Where should they expect to hear about office closures? Approximately how far in advance? What is your notification protocol of COVID-19 positive cases among employees? Setting these expectations will minimize uncertainty and confusion.

It's also just as important to communicate with the right frequency during the storm. People quickly tune out when overloaded with too many notifications—or notifications that might not even be relevant to them. Instead, reserve push notifications to communicate the most urgent information—such as office or road closures—and create a real-time information hub that employees can access to get general updates on developing winter weather situations.

Utilizing the event page functionality available within an emergency communication system can provide a single online repository for everything related to a specific weather event. Instead of employees calling or emailing for information, or worse, being left in the dark, they can continually visit the provided event page link, making it easier and more efficient for organizations to keep employees informed every step of the way.



## Real-World Success

### austin pets alive!

#### Austin Pets Alive Uses AlertMedia to Keep Employees Safe During Winter Storms

Founded in 1997, Austin Pets Alive (APA) is a nonprofit organization specializing in programs designed to save populations of animals most at risk of euthanasia. Since 2008, the organization has saved upwards of 80,000 pets and helped turn Austin, Texas into the largest “No Kill” city in the United States. But like most businesses in Texas, they were sidelined by the deep freeze during the 2021 winter storm.

When winter storm Uri spread unprecedented snowfall and damaging ice across Texas in February 2021, Austin Pets Alive was one of many organizations that needed a way to keep their employees safe and informed despite power outages, water quality issues, and unsafe driving conditions. With AlertMedia’s multichannel, two-way emergency communication software, Austin Pets Alive was able to keep employees informed about campus status, street closures, and the storm’s progression.

As the storm worsened and impacted critical city infrastructure, they also leveraged survey notifications to check in on employees and determine who needed water, power, or supplies. By deploying rapid multichannel messages, Austin Pets Alive was able to distribute resources to employees and ensure the safety of both their staff and shelter animals during the storm.

**“We work with such a large, ever-expanding network of volunteers and have people in and out of our shelters daily—and most of us aren’t in front of a desk. If there’s an emergency at one of our locations, it’s crucial for us to have a way to quickly communicate with the right employees over channels that will reach them.”**

Stephanie Bilbro, Director of Shelter Operations at Austin Pets Alive



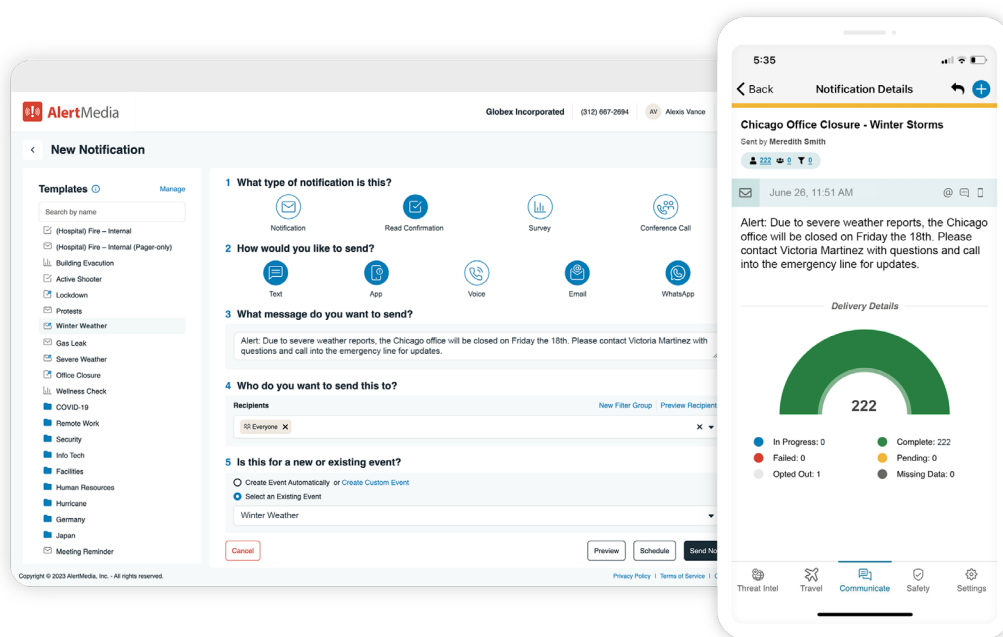
# Warm Up Your Bottom Line

**Winter can have a chilling effect on employee safety, workforce productivity, and business operations—but it doesn't have to be that way.**

Every business faces changing threats as winter approaches—whether winter brings snow, rain, or plummeting temperatures. But being prepared for the many hazards of winter weather can help you better manage the impact of such incidents on your employees, your customers, and your bottom line. With proper preparation and effective communication, you can prevent winter weather from wreaking havoc on your business, ensuring employee safety and business continuity all season long.

With AlertMedia's emergency communication system, you can keep your employees safe, informed, and connected when it matters most. Features like live threat monitoring with geofencing, two-way communication, and multichannel delivery allow you to instantly reach all of your employees—whether they are in the office, traveling, or working remotely. Regardless of employee location, how they work, or what device they are using, you can ensure everyone gets the messages they need, when they need them.

AlertMedia helps organizations across the country ensure employee safety and maintain business operations when severe weather hits—and we can help you too.



**LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW ALERTMEDIA CAN HELP  
YOUR BUSINESS WITH EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

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