



Ask the State Meteorologist

When it comes to Pennsylvania, we tend to see wintry weather anywhere from October through April, with the greatest impact typically during the months of January, February, and March. Snow, sleet, ice, heavy rain, cold, wind, flooding, and ice jams can all impact Pennsylvania during winter. Learn more about winter weather and preparedness from the Pennsylvania State Meteorologist Jeff Jumper.

The National Weather Service (NWS) uses a lot of winter terms, what are the differences between them?



The terms "Winter Storm" or "Winter Weather" are all-encompassing for storms containing snow, ice or both, and are the most common set of terms you will see during Pennsylvania winters. Freezing rain covers general icing, while ice storm is reserved for significant ice accumulations that can produce major and widespread damage to property, trees, and utilities. Blizzard is reserved for a storm with blowing snow and strong wind lasting at least three hours (it does not have to be actively snowing for a blizzard).

Snow squalls are small, short-lived, bursts of snow and wind which reduce visibility and slicken roadways. Wind chills and damaging non-storm winds are sometimes dangerous too during the winter, and can result in special NWS alerts. Any frost/freeze alerts are issued around agriculture and growing season. Of course flooding from snowmelt, heavy rain, or ice jams and severe weather alerts can be mixed in on rare occasions. We even had several tornadoes in recent years during February!

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What is a snow squall and why is it a big deal?

Snow squalls are not new, but our understanding of what causes them and how dangerous they can be to drivers has improved drastically in recent years. Similar to a thunderstorm, a snow squall is a brief and intense storm moving quickly and covering a small area. Snow squalls create instant whiteout, blinding conditions while quickly slickening the roadway. Drivers often go from clear, sunny, cold weather on dry pavement into a wall of white, icy roadways in a matter of seconds. Numerous multi-vehicle accidents have occurred on Pennsylvania interstates over the years because of snow squalls, with limited warning to drivers. The NWS has worked to better predict days when squalls may occur to allow drivers to adjust travel plans in advance. Leading up to a squall, a "Snow Squall Warning" may be issued by the NWS to alert drivers. The best course of action is to delay or avoid driving on squall days. The second best is to plan your travel and include methods to receive the snow squall warnings on your route in order to pull off at an exit and avoid them. The only safe place during a squall is off the roadway, because once you enter one, there is no refuge. To learn more about snow squalls and actions to take, visit www.weather.gov.



February 13, 2016, I-78 Snow Squall
Image Credit: James Robinson

Ask the State Meteorologist continued

What are the different alerts the National Weather Service (NWS) issue for winter weather?

The NWS will issue a few different alerts for winter weather hazards, including winter storm, ice storm, freezing rain, wind chill, blizzard, and snow squall. Each of these hazards are unique, but all should be taken seriously. A few days prior to an event, the NWS may issue a **watch** when the ingredients are coming together for winter weather, but the confidence and details are still a bit uncertain. Closer to a winter weather event, an **advisory or warning** may be issued. An **advisory** is issued when wintry weather is *likely*, but is more of an *inconvenience, nuisance, or a disruption*. A **warning**, the most serious alert, is issued when wintry weather is *likely* and may be a *threat to life and property*. You can receive these messages on TV, radio, weather radio, phone or email. Be sure to visit [AlertPA](#) to sign up for notifications.

Weather Alert Words

In cupcake terms...



The NWS will issue alerting products based on confidence and threat level. So an outlook is issued several days in advance when confidence and threat details are lower. A warning is issued very close to the weather event when confidence and threat significance are both high.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, also known as LIHEAP, opens November 1, 2019.



Have a heating emergency?
please call your county
assistance office



CASH GRANTS

Cash grants help families pay their heating bills. The grant payment is sent directly to the utility company or fuel provider.

CRISIS GRANTS (EMERGENCY SITUATIONS)

- Broken heating equipment/leaking lines that must be fixed/replaced
- Lack of fuel
- Termination of utility service
- Danger of being without fuel (less than a 15 day supply) or of having utility service terminated



Holiday Safety

Keeping fire safe should be a priority during the holidays. The [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#) provides these top 10 safety tips to keep yourself and your family safe during the holidays.

- Stay in the kitchen when you are cooking on the stove top, so you can keep an eye on the food.
- Stay in the home when cooking your turkey and check on it frequently.
- Keep children away from the stove. The stove will be hot, and kids should stay three feet away.
- Make sure kids stay away from hot food and liquids. The steam or splash from vegetables, gravy, or coffee could cause serious burns.
- Keep knives out of the reach of children.
- Be sure electric cords from an electric knife, coffee maker, plate warmer, or mixer are not dangling off the counter within easy reach of a child.
- Keep matches and utility lighters out of the reach of children — up high in a locked cabinet.
- Never leave children alone in a room with a lit candle.
- Keep the floor clear so you do not trip over children's toys, pocketbooks, or bags.
- Make sure your smoke alarms are working. Test them by pushing the test button.

Thanksgiving is the peak day for home cooking fires, followed by Christmas Day, Christmas Eve, and the day before Thanksgiving. According to the [NFPA](#), in 2016, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated 1,570 home cooking fires on Thanksgiving.

Did you know cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home injuries?



You are 400% more likely to experience a cooking fire on **Thanksgiving** than any other day during the year according to [National Fire Protection Association](#).

Thanksgiving is the leading day for home fires involving cooking equipment, with **4** times the average number.

The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking. The most common causes of an oven fire is grease residue. Something that could catch fire was too close to the equipment on **10%** of cooking fires and **23%** of deaths.

What you should know about home cooking safety:

- Be alert! If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, do not use the stove or stovetop.
- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, boiling, or broiling food.
- If you are simmering, baking, or roasting food, check it regularly, remain in the kitchen while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you that you are cooking.
- Keep anything that can catch fire — oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels, or curtains — away from your stovetop.
- Turn pot handles inward, to prevent burns caused by overturned pans or spills.
- Create and enforce a three-foot child – free zone around your stove.



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pennsylvania

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

www.pema.pa.gov

Preparedness Events in November

Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month

(<https://www.cisa.gov/infrastructure-security>)

National Veterans and Military Families Appreciation Month

(<https://www.asymca.org/military-family-month>)

Winter Weather Awareness Week (November 11 - 15)

(<https://www.weather.gov/>)

Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: www.pema.pa.gov

Ready PA: www.ready.pa.gov

SERVPA: www.serv.pa.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.fema.gov

Office of the State Fire Commissioner: www.osfc.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Banking and Securities: www.dobs.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: www.dcnr.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Governor's Office of Homeland Security: www.homelandsecurity.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Insurance Department: www.insurance.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General: www.attorneygeneral.gov

Pennsylvania State Police: www.psp.pa.gov

PA511Connect: www.511pa.com