

Winter Weather Awareness

November 9, 2022

Wisconsin Incidents

Snow Squall

- A fast-moving clipper system moved across the Upper Mississippi Valley on February 18, 2022 bringing strong winds, accumulating snow, snow squalls, and very cold wind chills
- Prompted the issuance of multiple Snow Squall Warnings across central and east-central Wisconsin (these were officially the first Snow Squall Warnings issued by the NWS Green Bay office)
- Most locations across central and northeast Wisconsin received about 1 to 3 inches of snow and gusts as high as 62 mph
- There was a thundersnow in Fond du Lac County
- A snow squall is like a mini-blizzard - an intense short-lived burst of heavy snowfall, and generally last 30 to 60 minute
- Snow squall warnings are issued like a severe thunderstorm warning
- The combination of quick reductions in visibilities and sudden slick conditions on roadways can often lead to **high speed wrecks, pileups, and subsequently injuries and fatalities**; there is also a high economic impact as interstates can be shut down for hours.

White Out

- A sudden burst of heavy snow on April 22, 2021 caused a 100-vehicle pileup on I-41 in Washington County
- Occurred shortly before noon
- 20 crashes on an 18-mile stretch of interstate
- Six people hospitalized
- 26 people treated for injuries
- One death
- 50 stranded motorists had to be transported by a bus service
- Interstate was shut down both ways for about nine hours

Ice

- Freezing rain on December 23, 2021 led to massive pileup on I-94 near Osseo
- Early morning, 5:45 am
- More than 100 vehicles involved
- I-94 closed for 13 hours
- 21 ambulances on scene
- 15-20 people taken to hospital, no deaths

Winter Weather Impacts:

- People stranded in vehicles (food, water, heat, bathroom needs)
- MVC injuries and stranded motorists
- Loss of power
- Cardiac incidents
- Frostbite and hypothermia
- Carbon monoxide poisoning
- Road closures – staff cannot get into work
- Sheltering staff at work
- Supply chain concerns

Preparedness:

- Review plans for **staff** response that include:
 - Staff notification for when to report to work
 - Management of staff absences or shortages due to transportation or other event impacts
 - Preparations for staff that remain on site if roadways are not passable
 - If warranted, facilities should have plans to bring in additional staff to ensure sufficient coverage during the weather event and recovery period
 - Providers should ensure they have enough supplies to last a period of at least 72 hours after the severe winter weather begins without expectation of delivery from suppliers
- Facility-based providers should test their emergency generators as soon as possible to ensure that they are operating properly
- Ensure that all computers and networks, necessary for disaster planning and response, are supported by generator power
- Those providers, particularly nursing homes with ventilator dependent patients, that identify problems with their generator operation should immediately call for service and inform their local office of emergency management if they are not able to have generator operations restored
- Adult care facilities that do not have generators should ensure they have adequate supplies of food that can be served without heating, and additional blankets and plans for keeping residents warm
- Facility-based providers should also check their fuel supply and take necessary action to ensure that it is adequate to cover operation for at least the next 72 hours
- During and following severe winter weather, facilities needing assistance due to prolonged power outages should make requests for assistance through their local Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

- Facility-based providers should ensure that as soon as possible and at all times, all entrances and egress locations are kept clear of snow, ice and other debris
- Homecare Agencies:
 - Homecare agencies and hospices are encouraged to review patient care needs and consider adjustment of visits to ensure that Level 1 patients are visited prior to the start of the storm, and that these, and all patients are reminded of how to call for assistance if they lose their power or have a medical emergency
 - Plans for adjusting staff schedules/prioritizing patient visits in the days immediately following the storm should be made, particularly if travel is still impeded, with a focus on reassigning staff based on proximity to patients to limit travel and reduce staff exposure to hazardous conditions
 - Agencies should also ensure that staff and their patients have enough supplies to cover a period of at least 72 hours following the start of the storm
 - Agencies should be ready to contact staffing contractors if a large proportion of their regular staff are unable to travel and perform any of their normal visits for a period of time
 - Agencies should also be ready to communicate with their patients during and immediately following the storm to perform checks on their safety and condition of their health
 - A plan for managing situations where patients refuse to evacuate a hazardous situation, should be developed and included in the Agency's emergency response plan
- End Stage Renal Dialysis centers
 - Dialysis centers should consider potential impacts on transportation services and try to schedule dialysis patients currently scheduled to come in for an earlier treatment.

Resources:

Many great tools on this site for winter weather planning:

- <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/MediaLibraries/URMCMedia/flrtc/2015-Healthcare-Provider-Severe-Weather-info.pdf>
 - Storm preparedness and response tools and checklists for healthcare facilities
 - Sheltering/staff preparedness
 - General resources