WINTER WEATHER AWARENESS – INTRODUCTION AND WINTER WEATHER

RUN TIME: 5 MIN, 37 SECONDS

Stefanie Bond, Public Information Officer
Lucinda Robertson, Public Information Officer
Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Jeff Johnson, Warning Coordination Meteorologist
Aubry Wilkins, General Forecaster
National Weather Service – Des Moines, Iowa

JEFF: Hi, I'm Jeff Johnson with the National Weather Service office in Des Moines, Iowa.

LUCINDA: I'm Lucinda Robertson with Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management

AUBRY: I'm Aubry Wilkins with the National Weather Service in Des Moines.

STEFANIE: I'm Stefanie Bond with Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

LUCINDA: Each year Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management partners with the National Weather Service to promote winter weather awareness in Iowa. Jeff, can you tell us more about the activities the National Weather Service is undertaking?

JEFF: Yes, I'd be happy to. Of course, every fall we do Winter Weather Awareness Day, and it's simply designed to get Iowans in tune to the fact that yes, the days are getting shorter, it's getting colder outside, and soon we'll be dealing with, uh, winter storms, ice storms, and cold weather. And we just want to get people, you know, back into the mood of knowing what to do in the event of a winter storm, how to get information, and how to remain safe this winter.

LUCINDA: I'm sure that this fall's warm weather may have fooled folks into believing that winter storms aren't a pressing concern – but we all know it's just a matter of "when," not "if."

JEFF: Yeah, typically we, uh, do see several storms here in Iowa which produce snowfall each year and, you know, significant snow at times. And, of course, then we also get the ice concerns, arctic blasts from the north, and everything else. So, yeah, I mean it won't be long until we're faced with this and it can really get going in November – and really picks up steam, you know, of course, in December and January.

STEFANIE: I think a lot of people – when the watches and the warnings start coming out – may get confused between a winter storm, a blizzard, or blowing snow advisory. So can you kind of tell us the difference between all of those – all of those products that you have?

JEFF: I'd be happy to, and of course there are a lot of products that we issue at the [National] Weather Service. In fact, sometimes we think there are too many products. But, nonetheless, we do have three things to generally remember and you'll be o.k. in understanding what we're trying to say. First of all, a watch means conditions are favorable for the development of a winter storm. Typically – or an ice storm. Typically, we send those out – you know, 24 to 36, occasionally up to 48 hours and even beyond – in advance of the storm. It means roughly there's a 50-50 [percent] chance of it actually occurring. So a winter storm watch does not necessarily mean it's gonna happen; it means be ready for the event that it might happen. Also, if you have travel planned, you might consider well, gee, can I delay it?

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm.

JEFF: Or make contingency plans in case it does occur? You know, make sure your – your safety kits are ready to go and everything. So you're kind of ready to move, or not move, in a winter storm.

STEFANIE: Sure.

JEFF: Now when we get to the warning phase, the confidence goes up to over 80 percent. So the likelihood of it happening is – is now in the likely or very likely state. Usually winter storm warnings aren't issued beyond 36 hours [in advance of the storm]. You can see them up to 48 hours, but it, usually it's closer to, you know, the present time. And it means that dangerous winter weather is approaching. And really, that comes in two or three forms. One is a winter storm, which is kind of the "kitchen sink;" you could get some heavy snow, you can get some, uh, maybe a little ice mixed in, some wind. You can also get an ice storm warning, which is predominantly ice and not mixed precipitation – but it's, you know, ice accrual. And thirdly, we have the blizzard warning, which in a lot of respects is the most serious of our winter weather warnings. And it means falling or blowing snow reducing visibilities to less than a quarter, or a quarter mile or less for more than three hours at a time. The key is you don't necessarily have to have falling snow to have a blizzard – it could be what we call a "ground blizzard" – and that's very common in northern Iowa. You know, especially in mid-winter, when you're talking January, early February, when you've got quite a bit of snow pack up there and the flat nature of the terrain in northern Iowa really makes it susceptible to these – this type of weather.

And then the final thing we do is the advisory. And what an advisory is, is something that's not as serious as a warning, but you should take heed from it and slow down. But you can probably still get around and get where you need to go, but you want to be aware definitely that you may need some extra time to get from point "A" to "B."

STEFANIE: So it's a little more serious than a watch?

JEFF: Well, it's different than a watch. A watch means "possible."

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm.

JEFF: [An] advisory means it's gonna happen, it's just not as high of [an] impact as a warning.

STEFANIE: O.k.

JEFF: Better way to look at it.

STEFANIE: O.k. That definitely makes sense.

JEFF: O.k.

STEFANIE: Aubry, can you explain the "wind chill factor" and how – how that makes temperatures different?

AUBRY: Sure. The wind chill is a "feels like" temperature – it's what it feels like outside. Um, it's, doesn't impact "things," inanimate objects – like your car engine – but it will impact your body. What happens is, your body, as you're outside, produces a little bubble of warmth around you and the wind will come by and wick that little bubble of warmth off of you. And so you lose heat through your body as if it were a different temperature than the actual temperature – the air temp. So, the air temperature could be 32 [degrees], but with the wind chill it could be 10 [degrees]. And it just means that you will be losing heat as if it *were* 10 degrees. It doesn't mean it *is* 10 degrees, it just *feels* like 10 degrees when you're outside, to your body.

STEFANIE: Do you want to go over wind chill advisory, watch and warnings?

AUBRY: We have a wind chill advisory which we issue when we're expecting wind chill temperatures to be between negative 20 and negative 30 degrees Fahrenheit. A wind chill watch means that warning criteria temperatures are possible. And warning criteria temperatures are below negative 30 degrees Fahrenheit. A little chilly.

STEFANIE: That's – pretty chilly, yes. And when it's that cold outside, we're worrying about frostbite and hypothermia.

AUBRY: Correct. You're very susceptible to those kind of impacts when you're outside for extended periods of time. So make sure that you bundle up. Make sure you wear gloves or mittens and especially a hat. And when it gets that cold with that cold of air blowing around, um, a scarf is very important to protect your lungs and your internal organs. It's also important to remember your animals that may be outside at that time, too.

STEFANIE: Let "Fido" come inside?

AUBRY: Exactly.