

Driving – Winter Weather Terminology

Drivers usually cannot choose the weather that they're driving in. However, knowing conditions in advance of a trip can help make you more prepared and may give you the warning you need to avoid dangerous situations. Knowing some of the common terminology should help you determine the extent of weather conditions when driving or preparing for the trip.

- **Winter Weather Advisory.** A mixture of precipitation is expected, such as snow, sleet, and freezing rain or drizzle.
- **Snow Alerts** are issued in the following categories:
 - Advisory.* Over 2 in (5 cm) but not expected to accumulate more than 6 in (15 cm).
 - Heavy Snow Warning.* 6 in (15 cm) or more in 12 hours or less; 8 in (20 cm) or more in 24 hours or less; light winds.
- **Winter Storm.** Alerts are issued in the following categories:
 - Watch.* Conditions are favorable for the development of hazardous weather elements, such as heavy snow and/or blizzard conditions or significant accumulations of freezing rain or sleet. Conditions may occur singly or in combination. Usually issued 24 to 48 hours in advance of an event.
 - Warning.* Heavy snow and some windiness are imminent or very likely, perhaps in combination with sleet and/or freezing rain/drizzle. Usually issued for up to a 12-hour duration, but can be extended to 24 hours.
 - Blizzard Warning.* Issued for winter storms with sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 mph (56 kph) or greater, and considerable falling and/or blowing snow, reducing visibility to less than 1/4-mi (.4 km). These conditions are expected to last at least three hours.
- **Ice Storm Warning.** Damaging accumulations expected during freezing rain conditions, making walking and driving extremely dangerous. Significant ice accumulations are usually 1/4-in (.64 cm) or greater.
- **Wind Chill.** Alerts are issued in the following categories:
 - Advisory.* Wind chills will be -35 °F (-37 °C) or colder for a sustained period of time. Winds are expected to be at least 10 mph (16 kph).
 - Warning.* Wind chills are expected to reach -50 °F (-46 °C) and wind speeds are 10 mph (16 kph) or greater. [Note: Some areas, due to the effects of humidity, give a warning when the wind chill is expected to reach -10 °F (-23 °C).]