

Severe Storms and Winter Storms

The WSU All-Hazards Mitigation Plan has identified severe storms as the number one threat to the Pullman campus. Local weather events that could happen consists of:

Wind storms happen often in the Northwest, with local wind speeds recorded into the 80 mph range causing widespread damage.

Thunderstorms are common in Eastern Washington and in the Palouse. These can be accompanied by brief, heavy rains that can cause flash flooding, lightning and localized microburst winds that can be very damaging. Lightning-caused wildfires occur regularly in the area, notably recent wildfires across the state.

Tornadoes are rare events in the Northwest, but they can happen anywhere. A tornado actually damaged buildings on campus in 1928.

Hail is produced by many strong thunderstorms. Hail sizes can range from pea to softball size, becoming very dangerous and destructive to vegetation and property. Hail storms happen frequently in this area.

Winter storms may be the most common severe weather Pullman encounters. Even during mild years, Pullman can be struck with extreme cold, wind and snow.

While a severe storm can strike anytime of the year, severe storms during winter months are a common occurrence in the inland northwest. WSU plans and prepares for these weather events and strives to remain open during severe storms to maintain operations and academic continuity. Occasionally, conditions are severe enough that normal functioning of the university will be impacted and can grind the whole city to a halt, shutting down roads and public transportation. Please consider the following when preparing for severe storms:

Before A Storm

- Be Aware. Weather radios enable you to monitor weather related forecasts, watches and warnings, 24 hours a day from the [National Weather Service](#).
- Check the [WSU ALERT](#) website for warnings and updates.
- Local news and weather on TV and radio stations can keep you informed.

Severe Storm Watches and Warnings

- A severe storm **watch** indicates that severe weather may affect your area. A severe storm **warning** indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way or have already begun.
- A blizzard warning means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

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- WSU Alert communications tools such as the emergency notification system and the Campus Outdoor Warning System of sirens and PA announcements may be used to provide warning and notification of severe weather approaching campus.

During a Storm

- Assess your personal situation. Follow all directives regarding your personal safety provided by appropriate university authorities.
- Generally, if you are indoors, move away from windows or other objects that could fall.
- Stay safe, warm, dry and calm.
- Generally, if you are outdoors, seek shelter inside a safe building.
- Do not go outside if you don't have to.
- Do not drive unnecessarily. Of deaths related to ice and snow, 70% occur when people are stranded in cars or involved in accidents. If you must drive, bring necessary supplies.
- Listen to a portable radio and/or WSU communications tools (if on or near campus) for emergency instructions.

If you have to drive during a winter storm:

- Be prepared! Have basic emergency supplies with you in your vehicle, such as a flashlight, water, snacks, road salt and sand, blankets, and a first aid kit.
- Make sure your vehicle has good tires, has plenty of fuel, is well-maintained and you have tire chains that fit (and you know how to install them!)
- Check your route before you go, travel during the day, and keep others informed of your route.

What if I get stuck?

- In extreme cold or in heavy snow, stay with your car until you can be rescued.
- Run the motor about ten minutes each hour for heat. Open the window a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked, which would cause dangerous fumes to back up inside the car.
- Make yourself visible to rescuers. Tie a bright cloth to you antenna or door to alert rescuers.
- Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm. Avoid overexertion.
- Drink fluids and eat frequently to avoid dehydration.
- Turn on your dome light, at night, when running the engine.
- Raise the hood indicating trouble after snow stops falling.

After A Storm

- Check you and others around you for injuries. Evacuate damaged buildings, if needed.
- Call 9-1-1 (or 9-911 from a campus phone) only to report a life threatening emergency.

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- Stay tuned to the local radio or TV for more information. Monitor WSU communications tools for further instructions or an “all clear” notice.
- During a winter storm, practice common sense before going outside after a storm. Dress in many layers and wear a hat.
- Be careful driving, as roads may still be frozen, wet, covered in debris.
- Restock your emergency supplies and reevaluate your emergency plan for next time.

Additional links to Information

- [NOAA National Weather Service](#) in Spokane
- [Washington State Department of Transportation](#)-Check your route!
- [Ready.gov](#) –Prepare for Emergencies
- [DOT Winter Driving](#) - Emergency Car Kit

Stay Informed

- [WSU ALERT](#) website
- [WSU News](#) and [WSU Announcements](#)