

Winter Can Pose Hazards To Michigan Residents

Heavy snow, extreme cold, ice and wind routinely affect Michigan during winter and pose dangers to its residents and property. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, 37 people in Michigan died due to exposure to the cold in 2006, the last year that statistics were available.

In an effort to raise awareness about the potential dangers, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has declared November 9 – 15, 2008, as Winter Hazards Awareness Week in Michigan. IIM is a member of the Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness, which sponsors activities to promote weather safety to Michigan residents.

According to the Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness, Michigan's temperatures for the 2007-08 winter season ended near average. However, the winter ended with nearly twice as much precipitation across Southern Lower Michigan, leading to near record snowfalls. Grand Rapids and Flint both had their second snowiest winters on record; Saginaw had its third snowiest winter; and Detroit finished with its fourth snowiest winter.

The parade of winter storms started in December and did not end until mid-April. The first hit during the first few days in December and impacted nearly every part of the state. Upper, Northern and Central Michigan had heavy snow of 6 to 12 inches, while sleet and freezing rain coated Southern Lower Michigan. The final storm of 2007 hit on December 22 and 23 with wind gusts up to 40 to 55 mph, creating nearly \$400,000 in damage in Southeast Lower Michigan.

The New Year started with a New Year's Eve and New Year's Day snowstorm that left much of Southern Lower Michigan with 6 to 10 inches of snow. Occasional blinding white-out conditions in falling and blowing snow in the lake effect areas produced widespread blizzard conditions. The snow didn't stop during the months of March and April. To bring in the first day of spring, a storm left portions of the southern third of Lower Michigan with 6 to 14 inches of snow.

To prepare for this year's winter storm at home, the Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness recommends the following:

- Keep handy a battery-powered flashlight, NOAA weather radio and portable radio, extra food (canned or dried food is best), can opener, and bottled water (at least 3 gallons per person).
- Make sure each member of household has a warm coat, gloves, hat and water-resistant boots.
- Ensure that extra blankets and heavy clothes are available.
- Keep on hand items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- Be aware of potential fire and carbon monoxide hazards if you plan to use an emergency heating source such as a fireplace, wood stove or space heater.

For a complete packet of information to promote winter weather safety, contact Lori Conarton, IIM Communications Director, at iim@iiminfo.org.