

Public Information Statement  
National Weather Service Albany NY  
800 AM EDT Thu Nov 3 2016

...Winter Weather Awareness Week Continues...

October 30 to November 5 is Winter Weather Awareness Week in New York and New England.

One of our costliest winter weather hazards is flooding.

In eastern New York and western New England one usually associates winter with snow, ice, and biting cold. But sometimes nature throws a curve at us, with unseasonable warmth, and with it, rain.

A number of different factors work together to make floods in winter.

When unseasonable warmth comes to the region it will often melt much of the snow on the ground. The melting snow can saturate the ground and also begin to swell the rivers.

Often the warmer air will rise over colder air trapped in the region. As this air rises it results in clouds and rain, which will combine with the melting snow to increase flows in the rivers. Melting snow and heavy rain can put enough water into the rivers to send them over their banks.

Some of our worst winter floods are caused by intense cyclones that track from the Ohio Valley northeast up the Saint Lawrence River Valley into Canada. These storms bring a lot of warm and moist air to our region from over the Atlantic Ocean.

In April 2011, the Adirondacks saw record river flows at many locations due to melting snow combined with heavy rain.

Another winter problem in this area is flooding caused by ice jams in the rivers. Our area is particularly susceptible to ice jam flooding. In January 2010 and March 2011, communities along the Mohawk River experienced severe ice jam flooding.

Since ice that covers the rivers is lighter than water it will float. Under the pressure of rising water, ice will often break into huge slabs. These slabs will then move downstream in the current until they run into an obstruction such as a bend, island or wide shallow area. When this happens the ice will often stop and pile up into a jam. When ice dams the flow of the river, the water can overflow the banks in less than an hour as it tries to get around the ice. Also, as the water rises the pressure can break the jam and release a sudden surge of water and ice down the river.

While ice jams often form in the same spots year after year it is nearly impossible to predict exactly when or where a jam will form, or when one will break. Sometimes a jam that forms in early winter will freeze in place for most of the winter.

Severe flooding of roads and built up areas can also occur when mounds of plowed snow and ice block and plug up the storm drains, so the water from the pavement has nowhere to go. This standing water can cause dangerous black ice if it freezes.

NOAA Weather Radio offers one way to receive immediate relay of any winter weather warnings. Many local television and radio stations also broadcast weather alerts. Computers and wireless devices can also receive warnings. The Red Cross, state emergency management agencies and private vendors have wireless applications that will alert you of threatening weather by relaying National Weather Service warnings.

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