

Public Information Statement
National Weather Service Albany NY
800 AM EDT Thu Oct 31 2024

...Winter Weather Awareness Week Continues...

October 27 to November 2 is Winter Weather Awareness Week in New York and New England.

One of our costliest winter weather hazards is flooding.

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, or runoff frozen ground, and begin to swell the rivers.

Often, warmer air will rise over cooler air trapped in lower levels of the atmosphere. 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 the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean.

On December 25, 2020, many of the rivers in our area exceeded flood stage due to melting of a deep snowpack combined with heavy rain.

Another winter problem in this area is flooding caused by ice jams in the rivers. In January 2018, communities along the Mohawk River experienced ice jam flooding. The upper Hudson River in Warren County is another ice jam hot spot.

Ice that covers the rivers is lighter than water and 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 river 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 rest 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. The Albany National Weather Service Forecast Office broadcasts twenty four hours a day from stations in New York and western New England.

Computers and wireless devices can also receive warnings. The Red Cross, FEMA, state and local emergency management agencies and TV stations have wireless applications that will alert you of threatening weather by relaying National Weather Service warnings.

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NWS Albany