



[Getting ready for winter](#)

Getting ready for winter

With winter right around the corner, businesses are gearing up for what Mother Nature may bring their way.

"More than any other season, winter is a time when Mother Nature reminds us that the best laid plans often go awry," said Steve Strauss, a lawyer, author and senior USA Today small business columnist.

Strauss suggests businesses follow a four-step plan:

- Winterizing your business by checking pipes, windows and eaves, clearing storm drains and bringing in extra supplies in case someone gets stranded at the business.
- Assessing contingencies by checking for the potential for power outages, possibilities of equipment failure and employee safety and their ability to get to work.
- Planning for those contingencies and creating an emergency committee for employees to contact.
- Doing an emergency drill where an imaginary weather emergency is acted out.

Winter preparations mean different things to different businesses.

"We do a lot of preventive maintenance on our buses," said Eric Wolf, Amtran general manager. "We have two generators to run our communication system and emergency lighting. We can use our generators to fuel on site if there is a power outage."

"We have a contingency plan and test it over the year to make sure it works like it is supposed to work."

Imler's Poultry prepares its fleet of trucks by putting additives into the fuel system to keep the diesel fuel from gelling, said Clyde Monahan, general manager.

"We have three refrigeration towers. We winterize two and shut the other one down," Monahan said. "We have quality safety meetings with our drivers. They undergo safety training for winter driving. There is more preparation than people think. Our guys know what needs to be done and know how to get it done."

Local businesses should secure their supply chain now in anticipation of a difficult winter, said Randy Swart, chief operating officer of A. Duie Pyle, which has a location in Duncansville.

"When winter strikes, businesses are often left in the lurch, not able to get their shipments out on time because of cold weather," Swart said. "Companies or manufacturers who ship or receive any water-based products are particularly vulnerable to shipment delays. Many transportation companies are unable to provide shipping services when the temperature drops below 32 degrees because they don't have the proper equipment to keep the goods from freezing."

Swart said businesses should not wait.

"There are simply not enough heated and insulated trailers in the Northeast to meet the demand when the temperature drops, leaving many businesses scrambling for another solution once a cold snap strikes."

"Prepare your supply chain now so when a weather event occurs there are no interruptions to your business," Swart said.

Businesses need to make sure their equipment is ready for the winter.

"We get our equipment set up, make sure the plows for trucks, salt spreaders and snow blowers are ready," said Jim DeStefano, director of facilities and plant operations at UPMC Altoona.

"We did some sealing and pressure cleaning of the tower building to prevent leaking and air infiltration," he said. "We always have to be prepared. We have been doing things for so long we take it in stride," DeStefano said.

Businesses like Knisely & Sons, Hollidaysburg, shift gears.

November 9, 2014
Altoona Mirror

"When winter rolls around, we shift gears from cooling repairs to heating repairs," owner Greg Knisely said. "We use different tools, chemicals and a different mindset. We have to do winter maintenance on our trucks and make sure they have winter tires."

"We look out for our customers," Knisely said. "We have a list of maintenance things we do for customers. We have a lot of field experts who know how to keep heating systems tuned up and ready for the season. We try to take care of as many as we can before the season."

Most businesses have emergency and contingency plans.

"Being a hospital, we are required to do things by the Joint Commission," DeStefano said. "We have a snow emergency plan in place. As far as maintenance guys, alternate crews are on call for winter from Jan. 1 through April. Generators are part of our emergency planning. Our generators are tested monthly and they are at the top of the list."

"We have a generator system," Monahan said. "It exercises itself every week to make sure it will run when needed. Our generators are run by natural gas. We have been doing this for 111 years and we have learned a lot."

Heavy snow and bitter cold can cause a lot of problems.

"The biggest impact is with our home meals program," said Steve Williamson, president of Blair Senior Services Inc.

"We deliver three days a week. We have to make sure people have shelf-stable meals in place so they have food for the days that we can't deliver," he said.

"As far as transportation, the weather can impact our ability to provide that service," Williamson said. "We will not alter critical life trips. We may alter our routine trips, depending on the weather. If a person needs dialysis, it doesn't matter if there is snow. He still needs dialysis."

"Our deliveries increase exponentially, but heavy snow slows down deliveries significantly," said Bill Thompson III, president of Thompson's Pharmacy.

"Some of our drivers will park at the bottom of a hill, put on their four-way flashers and walk the deliveries to our customers," Thompson said. "We do what we can to safely deliver their medicine."

November 9, 2014
Altoona Mirror

Heavy snow can cut down on ridership for both Blair Senior Services and Amtran.

"That affects our ridership, especially our discretionary ridership. If we have too much snow it makes it difficult getting into some of the neighborhoods," Wolf said.

"If people don't ride, we don't get paid, so that affects our revenue if we have to cancel routes. We are like any other business in that sense. If we do not provide a service, we do not get paid," Williamson said.

Severe winter weather causes fear among business operators.

"Our biggest concern is ice. That is anybody's biggest fear - driving in icy conditions," Monahan said.

"Let's face it - when it is extremely cold, people have breakdowns. It is my fear I can't get to as many customers as quickly as I can. It is the 'I need it now kind of world,'" Knisely said.