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Public Information Statement
National Weather Service Boston/Norton MA
818 AM EST Mon Nov 21 2022

...November 21st is Snow Squall Safety Day...

The National Weather Service in Boston/Norton MA and surrounding Weather Forecast Offices have designated November 21st as Snow Squall Safety Day. In this Public Information Statement, we will define what a snow squall is, the hazards snow squalls can produce, National Weather Service products issued for snow squall threats, and some recommended safety measures.

A snow squall is an intense but short-lived burst of heavy snow, often lasting thirty to forty-five minutes in duration, accompanied by gusty winds and falling temperatures upon its passage. Snow accumulations are often minor due to their short duration, but high snowfall rates in that short period of time can produce localized whiteout conditions, with visibility dropping to one-quarter mile or less. Rapidly falling temperatures immediately behind a snow squall can freeze any liquid or melted snow on pavement, resulting in what is called a "flash freeze."

Snow squalls are primarily a transportation hazard, given their potential to produce localized whiteout conditions due to brief heavy snow, gusty winds and deteriorating road conditions from falling temperatures. These conditions can disorient drivers potentially resulting in vehicle accidents. The rapid reduction in visibility due to heavily falling snow can make drivers unaware of vehicle accidents or other road obstructions which lie ahead. This compounds the risk to motorists and can create very dangerous situations.

To bring greater awareness to snow squalls, National Weather Service forecasters can issue a Special Weather Statement (SPS) up to 24 hours before snow squalls are expected, including an approximate time frame for when snow squalls are most likely. When snow squalls are imminent or ongoing, Snow Squall Warnings are issued. Snow Squall Warnings are short-fused warnings, lasting up to one hour, which bring heightened awareness to snow squalls and their hazards. Prior to this year, all Snow Squall Warnings had triggered Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), where tone alerts are sent directly to mobile devices in the Snow Squall Warning area. As of this year, Snow Squall Warnings will follow a new tiered warning structure, similar to Severe Thunderstorm, Flash Flood and Tornado Warnings.

This will allow forecasters to draw greater attention to especially dangerous snow squalls. While a "base" Snow Squall Warning will exist, only those Snow Squall Warnings tagged as "significant" will trigger WEA.

The safest place to be during a snow squall is not on the roads. If a Snow Squall Warning is issued and plan to be driving, consider delaying your travel if possible until after the snow squall passes your location. If caught on the roads, be aware of short-lived whiteout conditions and rapidly deteriorating road conditions. If you can do so safely, consider pulling over to the side of the roadway and remain in your vehicle until the snow squall passes.

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