

NEWS RELEASE



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30th Anniversary of the Legendary “Blizzard of ‘78”

The Blizzard of '78. The very name conjures up images of blinding snow, stinging cold winds, snow drifts of fantastic proportions, and a region paralyzed by the snowstorm that has come to define the standard by which all subsequent winter storms are gauged. From the time the earliest flakes began flying on the morning of Wednesday, January 25, 1978, through the moment the snow finally relented during the early morning hours of Friday, January 27, 15.5 inches of snow fell on top of the 5 inches already on the ground at Indianapolis, which along with wind gusts of 55 mph and temperatures bottoming out at zero degrees, created a blizzard unlike any the area had ever seen, with 20-25 foot snow drifts burying homes and crippling the entire region for days or longer.

Ask most anyone in the Ohio Valley 35 years or older about the Blizzard of 1978, and they perk up. It seems everyone has a story to tell. All who have since experienced an Indiana winter have come to know some facet of blizzard lore. Many recall homes buried in snow, close calls with danger on the roadways, or even sledding from second floor windows after the storm finally released Indiana from its grip. One NWS employee who was off duty during the blizzard recalled stuffing newspaper into the cracks around his garage door to keep the howling winds from forcing the snow in through them. Several other NWS employees who were on duty at the time became stranded for up to 74 hours. Some recalled staff members trying everything to get some rest, including sleeping on boxes of teletype paper pushed together.

The human drama extended far beyond the confines of the NWS office at the Indianapolis International Airport. Highways were clogged with stranded motorists. Throughout the Midwest, doctors and emergency personnel were forced to reach people on skis and snowmobiles. The governor sent National Guard tanks onto I-65 to remove stranded semis. A snowbank stalled a seven car Amtrak train in Putnam County. Indiana Bell was forced to halt all phone traffic but emergency calls. In Franklin, the Daily Journal published on pink paper, explaining that the color would help readers find their papers in the snow.

Indianapolis Mayor Bill Hudnut managed to get to WIBC, and then the three major networks, which delivered information round the clock, to tell residents that the blizzard had completely shut down the city and the state. At one point, local and state officials were forced by the storm's ferocity to quietly pull police off the streets.

For those who were unprepared, the storm meant a long and difficult wait before supplies could once again be obtained. Neighbors banded together to ride out the storm. In northeast Indiana, where up to 40 inches of snow fell, airlifts of food were made for people and livestock. For those who ventured out, either by dire necessity or by unfortunate choice, they found an incredibly difficult journey ahead of them, fraught with peril.

Seventy people perished during the storm.

It is sometimes difficult to believe that the weather can be so dangerous and so extreme. Just last February, we were reminded that blizzards can and do happen in Indiana. Be prepared before winter storms strike. Have a preparedness kit in your home, and a survival kit in your vehicle. Do not venture out when conditions are hazardous. Pay attention to forecasts and warnings from the National Weather Service, and information from the local media. Winter storms are deceptive killers. Treat them with the respect due the situation. Respecting their power may just save your life.