

*Nature can be unbelievably powerful. A major earthquake can topple huge buildings and bring down entire mountainsides. At Niagara Falls, more than 3,000,000 gallons (11,356,800 liters) of water crash down 18 stories into the Niagara River every second—enough to fill nearly 50 Olympic-size swimming pools.*

Check new design of our homepage! What are the different manifestations of a snowstorm? The answers are forthcoming in this ScienceStruck article. Besides revealing their genesis, also listed, are the top 10 deadliest snowstorms of all time. ScienceStruck Staff Last Updated: Denizens of North America and Canada are no strangers to the freezing fury of snowstorms, a recurrent phenomenon that brings life to a standstill, every winter. Arising from the interplay of moisture, temperature, and pressure differences, snowstorms are some of the most potent destructive forces of nature. Capable of widespread disruption, snowstorms can literally bring life in any region to a standstill, due to the compromised visibility conditions, thick snow cover, and probable after-effects which include avalanches, coastal flooding, and extreme cold. How are Snowstorms Formed? To make the perfect snowstorm, the essential ingredients are cold air, moisture, and lift. Low temperatures set the stage for snow precipitation to occur, moisture from evaporating water bodies feeds the air currents, and lift facilitates the creation of clouds at higher altitudes that ultimately causes snowfall. The formation of such a storm begins when a high pressure system an envelope of air over a very low temperature land mass, called a ridge, comes in contact with a substantially low pressure system an envelope of air over a warmer land mass. Air from heavy pressure areas always moves towards low pressure areas to equalize pressure. In this case, the high pressure cold winds start blowing towards the low pressure areas. The low pressure air contains high moisture content. Clouds are formed as the hot humid air moves up, replaced by cold air below. Then finally when precipitation occurs, the water droplets coming down freeze due to low temperatures and what we get is a snowstorm. Here are the four weather conditions warm front, cold front, lake effect, and mountain effect that typically lead to a snowstorm: If the temperature falls very much below freezing point, an ice storm occurs. Snowstorms mostly occur in winter but are also known to occur in early spring, as well as late autumn. Sometimes, they also occur in exceptionally cold summers. The most powerful snowstorms occur in March. Types of Snowstorms Depending on the intensity of snow fall, formation pattern, degree of reduction in visibility, and wind speeds, snowstorms can be classified into various types: Snow Flurries These are short snow spells characterized by short duration and low intensity snowfall, with little or no accumulation. They are frequent occurrences in winter. Flurries are to snowfall, what drizzles are to rain. Snow Showers Characterized by longer durations, snow showers occur with varying intensities and last longer than flurries, with typical durations of an hour or more. Due to the sustained precipitation, snow showers can result in mild snow accumulation. Snow Squalls High intensity snowfall in short and sudden bursts, accompanied with gusts of wind, resulting in significant accumulation, is known as a snow squall. They are also known as whiteouts, due to the sudden reduction in visibility that characterizes their arrival. They can be particularly hazardous for motorists and are the cause of numerous accidents. Squalls are a common phenomenon in the Great Lakes region of North America. The two most distinct forms of snow squalls are - lake effect described above and frontal similar to cold front illustrated before. The blown snow may be swept off the surface or falling snow. Blowing snow indicates a blizzard in the making. When the blown snow stays below 6 feet, it is known as drifting snow. Blizzard In particular, snowstorms with wind speeds greater than 35 mph 30 knots and thick snowfall that reduces visibility down to less than quarter of a mile m , for at least three hours, are officially termed as blizzards. Ground blizzards are created by snow being swept off the ground by strong winds. These storms cause blizzard-like conditions, coastal flooding and drive hurricane-force winds. Severe weather conditions like blizzards have always inflicted massive devastation, almost every year, in some area of the globe. But once in a while, a particularly mean blizzard will turn up that redefines the very idea of devastation. There is no objective way of classification that can precisely identify and rank the ten most destructive blizzards of all time. The following ranking has been generated on the basis of the severity of the blizzard, measured in terms of snow cover, wind speeds, and scale of inflicted damages. Chicago Blizzard of On

January 26, 1979, Chicago was hit by a blizzard that left the city covered in a record-breaking 23 inches of snow. Wind speeds of 53 mph were recorded, with snowdrifts up to 10 feet observed. The city of Montreal saw a total of 10 feet of snow. It was one of the worst winters to have hit eastern Canada. With a maximum snow accumulation reading of 10 feet, New York city recorded 10 feet. The storm inflicted USD 5 million in damages, causing 3 recorded deaths. By the time it had dissipated, it had caused deaths and left close to injured, besides recording total damages to the tune of USD 1. All the major cities measured record-breaking snow accumulation, with Boston receiving 10 feet. Lhunze County, Tibet Tibet was struck by its worst snowstorm in 1952, with nearly 5 feet of snow blanketing most of Lhunze county. In 36 hours, it killed 7 people, caused more than 100,000 cattle deaths and left hundreds trapped in snow. It took almost three days to clear off the snow cover, for life to return to normalcy. The storm was further powered by ocean-effect snow a phenomenon similar to lake effect making the mercury dip below zero level. Cape May, New Jersey, was the worst affected, with 34 inches of snow piling up. Mount Shasta Storm Only overshadowed by the storm of the century that struck in 1996, the Mount Shasta Ski Bowl snowstorm delivered inches of snow in 1996, driving itself into record books. Since it mostly struck the mountainous regions, no loss of life and property was reported. It still holds the record for the most amount of snow deposited in a single snowstorm. According to the earliest records, Boston was the most affected city with snowdrifts reaching 25 feet. The Buffalo Blizzard With the snowfall topping at 25 feet, snowdrifts up to 25 feet were recorded, rendering visibility down to zero, making air and road travel impossible. The lake effect snow, generated by lake Ontario, combined with formidable snow cover, built previously, led to the deadliest of blizzards to have ever struck the upstate New York area. The most severely snowstorm-affected city in the United States is Valdez in Alaska, which receives an annual snowfall, amounting to inches. All over the United States, the average daily snowfall, caused by these storms is 2 inches. For mountainous areas, it is almost 7 inches. Snowstorms lead to rapid accumulation of snow, resulting into avalanches, which is tons of snow, traveling at speeds reaching miles per hour. Frostbite, hypothermia, and wind chill are some of the most common health hazards caused by snowstorms. The Rockies are most affected by mountain-effect triggered snowstorms and avalanches. The mid-west, owing its proximity to the Great Lakes is is pounded by heavy snow and blizzards caused by the lake-effect. Snowstorms and especially blizzards can be dangerous atmospheric calamities of unpredictable nature. Advanced warning systems have been put in place which can help people in preparing for the onslaught of these natural disasters. The National Weather Service NOAA is the best source of information for alerts regarding winter storms and other disruptive atmospheric phenomena.

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