Winter Natural Disasters: Blizzards And Snowstorms

You wake up on a Sunday morning to winds lashing at your bedroom walls and snow pounding on the roof like blocks of salt from the ash-gray sky. You wrap yourself in a blanket and join your huddled family in the living room. The newsman on TV states, "...Northeast unexpectedly hit with severe blizzard and winds…" "How did this even happen?" you think. Well, I have an answer for you. A blizzard forms when snow meets high winds and low visibility. If you aren't cautious of this seemingly innocent natural disaster, your body may be joining the snow on the ground.

Snowstorms are a concoction of many variables, such as temperature, winds, etc. A blizzard is pronounced as one when it meets several standards: when the visibility drops to .25 of a mile, winds or gusts of 35 mph or more, when snow is present, and when these circumstances last for a minimum of three hours (How Do Blizzards Form?). The ground, clouds, and winds of the area all need to be below freezing (32oF or 0oC) to prevent the snow from turning into rain or some other form of liquid precipitation. Speaking of precipitation, this is created when warm air rises over the cold, forming a front and creating rain or in this case, snow (What is a Blizzard?). Blizzards can occur almost anywhere, even in the tropics during the humid season where rain can occasionally freeze (Blizzards). Specifically in the United States, there is an area known as the Blizzard Alley. North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and other states are located in this region. There are fewer trees here that would provide friction against harsh winds, so frigid Canadian winds up north can easily enter (Yes, There is a 'Blizzard Alley,' and It's in the Plains). The duration of these winter storms can be from a few hours to several days, but it greatly varies on area, climate, and many other factors too long to list (Snowstorms and Extreme Cold). They can cause a few flimsy breaks to incredibly severe damage. Depending on the strength of the storm, accumulating snow on a weak rooftop can cause it to collapse and cave in. Other "side effects" include but are not limited to: water damage from melted snow, power/communication lines and buildings breaking from fallen branches, and broken windows from flying objects (Blizzard Damage). Besides houses and structures being completely destroyed, lives may be lost in the chaos. People may be affected by various injuries, diseases, illnesses, etc. so critical it costs them their existence. (Snowstorms and Extreme Cold). I know. Wow. So those are the basics. However, no matter how educated you are about the subject, always be cautious-for survival's sake.

Unlike some natural disasters, the warning signs from blizzards are pretty vague and are only noticeable when the storm is already on its way. However, your local weather or news can help your dilemma. They may send out a winter storm outlook, meaning that a blizzard can possibly arrive in the next 2-5 days. You don't necessarily have to buy a whole new pantry, but you should be aware of this. A couple of days later, you might receive a winter storm watch when the storm is likely to appear in 36-48 hours. At this point, it is recommended to start preparing. Lastly, a blizzard warning is when blizzard conditions are currently present (Snowstorms and Extreme Cold). If by then you didn't plan ahead, the best thing you can do is find shelter and wait it out. I've been mentioning preparing for a blizzard, yet I haven't told you how. The Washington Post strongly advises to create or buy emergency kits to treat any injury that can be caused by a blizzard. If you know days in advance, purchase groceries, blankets, and other equipment to stay warm and safe. Planning to visit family or make any other trips? Do these

days before the storm is predicted to come, just to be safe. If you want to help yourself and the community, lay salt on sidewalks and roads to melt the approaching snow. Clear any blockage from your gutters so water can escape rather than clogging the tubes (Jura Koncius). The dark side of severe winter storms is death. I bet you don't want to be part of this unfortunate group so take the following precautions. Stay inside a stable structure unless it is absolutely needed to go outside. If so, wear layers, layers, and more layers. Consider carrying heatable instruments and remember to always walk with caution, because water and ice on surfaces can lead to significant trauma. Also, constantly inform your close friends and family where you are, thus if something occurs, they will know where to locate you. Provided that by a slim chance you go outside, keep as dry as humanly possible. Wet clothes decrease the body's temperature, something definitely not wanted in this situation. Be watchful for frostbite. Common effects include loss of sense and pale color in fingers, toes, or any other isolated and unprotected area of your body. Even worse is hypothermia, which is usually noticed when the infected are shivering, have memory loss, slurred speech, and much more.