

WORST SNOWSTORMS IN THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

From 1881 to Present

(Excluding pure lake-effect snow storms)

- 1) **March 2-4, 1881** - Southern / Central - Blizzard - 2 to 4 feet of snow. Drifts to 20 feet. Milwaukee reported 28.5 inches. Between February 24 and March 20, 1881, Milwaukee received 63.7 inches of snow!
- 2) **January 15, 1887** - Southern / Central - Snowstorm - 2 feet of snow. Huge drifts.
- 3) **December 27-28, 1904** - Southern / Central - Heavy snow / ice. 26 inches of snow at Neillsville (Clark County) - still stands as the 24-hour state record.
- 4) **January 30-February 1, 1915** - Southern / Central - Heavy snow / ice - severe glazing. 10 inches of snow in Milwaukee.
- 5) **February 12-14, 1923** - Statewide - Blizzard - Heavy snow - severe drifting.
- 6) **February 4-5, 1924** - Southern - Blizzard - 20.3 inches at Milwaukee / 10 foot drifts. Still ranks as Milwaukee's heaviest snowfall in 24 hours.
- 7) **February 8-10, 1936** - Statewide - Blizzard - severe drifting.
- 8) **November 6-8, 1943** - Statewide - Heavy snow / ice - 10 to 18 inches of snow. Roads blocked for several days.
- 9) **January 28-30, 1947** - Southern / Central - Blizzard - 10 to 27 inches. Drifts to 15 feet. Roads blocked.
- 10) **April 8-9, 1973** - South half - Severe late season snowstorm - 10 to 20 inches. Madison had nearly 13 inches while Milwaukee measured a foot of heavy wet snow. Wind gusts above 50 mph. Many roads, including the interstates, were closed for two days.
- 11) **November 9-10, 1975** - Northern - Major snowstorm - 10 to 14 inches. 14 inches at Mellen in Ashland county. (Edmund Fitzgerald sinks in Lake Superior (Nov. 10).
- 12) **March 4-5, 1976** - South / East - devastating ice storm - One of the worst natural disasters to hit Wisconsin in history. This incredible ice storm completely snapped hundreds of utility poles, downed thousands of power and telephone lines and totally destroyed many trees. Some ice accumulations ranged up to a phenomenal five inches in diameter on wires and limbs of trees. The excessive ice accumulations were in part caused by thunderstorms that rapidly built up the ice. High winds gusting to 60 mph made a horrible situation even worse. Up to

600,000 residences were directly affected by the ice storm and up to 100,000 people were without power during the height of the storm. Some rural areas were without power for over 10 days. The following counties were declared federal disaster areas due to the ice storm: Calumet, Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Manitowoc, Ozaukee, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Vernon, Walworth, Washington and Waukesha.

13) **January 12-14, 1979** - Southeast - Near blizzard - 12 to 20 inches. Milwaukee had 14 inches. Drifts to 8 feet.

14) **January 3-4, 1982** - Southeast half - Blizzard - 8 to 16 inches. Northwest suburbs of Milwaukee had 16 inches. Madison reported 8 inches.

15) **January 22-23, 1982** - North half - Blizzard - 10 to 20 inches. Superior had 19 inches.

16) **November 30 - December 2, 1985** - Statewide (except southeast corner) - Widespread snows of 10 to 18 inches. Madison had about 10 inches.

17) **December 14-15, 1987** - South half - Blizzard (gusts to 73 mph) - 10 to 17 inches of snow. Madison and Milwaukee had 13 inches.

18) **December 2-3, 1990** - South half - Blizzard - Widespread 10 to 22 inches. Madison had 17.3 inches. Ranks as Madison's heaviest snowfall in 24 hours.

19) **October 31 - November 2, 1991** - Northwest / West Central - Blizzard - "Halloween Storm" - 15 to 30 inches, 6 to 10 foot drifts. 30 inches in Burnett, Douglas, Polk and St. Croix counties.

20) **November 26-27, 1995** - South half - Snowstorm - 7 to 14 inches. Snow fall rates of 2 to 3 inches per hour fell during the afternoon commute and resulted in a traffic "gridlock" around the Milwaukee area. Commute times surpassed 2 to 3 hours, where normally it would take 30 minutes. The highest snowfall total was 14 inches at Two Rivers.

21) **January 26-27, 1996** - Statewide - Heavy snow - 6 to 18 inches. Localized amounts of 16 to 18 inches fell along a line from La Crosse to Green Bay.

22) **March 13-14, 1997** - West Central / Northeast - Snowstorm - 12 to 28 inches. 28 inches at Wautoma in Waushara County.

23) **March 8-9, 1998** - Southwest / Central - Blizzard - 8 to 12 inches. Wind gusts reached 40 to 60 mph at times, causing frequent whiteout conditions. The heaviest snow total was 11.7 inches at Muscoda.

24) **January 2-3, 1999** - Southeast half - Blizzard - Widespread 6 to 20 inches. Wind gusts of 30 to 35 mph, with gusts of 50 to 60 mph near Lake Michigan, created frequent whiteout conditions. Snow drifts of 4 to 8 feet were common. Air temperatures were in the 15 to 22 F range. The heaviest snowfall total was in Slinger with 20.5 inches.

25) **October 25-26, 2001** – North central - Snowstorm - 12 to 19 inches. An early season snow storm along with Lake Enhancement off of Lake Superior brought 6-12 inches to north central Wisconsin. Locally, snow totals were 12-19 inches across mainly Vilas County.

26) **November 26-27, 2001**- Northwest - Snowstorm - 12 to 20 inches. The heaviest axis of snow occurred along a Siren to Ashland line. The heaviest total was 20.0 inches in southeast Bayfield County.

27) **March 14-15, 2002** - Northwest - Snowstorm - 8 to 20 inches. The heaviest axis of snow occurred across southern Bayfield, Ashland, and northern Iron -- ironically the same axis as the November 26-27, 2001 storm.

28) **April 27-28, 2002** - Northeast - Snowstorm - 8 to 20 inches. A late season storm brought significant heavy, wet snow accumulations in a narrow axis from Florence to Merrill. Most of the snow fell within 12 hours as a heavy rate with numerous reports of thunder and lightning. Elcho received the most snow with 20 inches of accumulation.

29) **January 21-22, 2005** - Statewide - Blizzard (gusts to 50 mph) - 6 to 15 inches. Although winds gusted up to 50 mph in some areas and visibilities were reduced to less than 1/4 mile due to falling or blowing snow, many areas didn't experience these conditions for 3 hours or more to classify as a full blizzard. Nonetheless, heavy snow and very windy conditions created near white-out conditions especially in the south and east. The heaviest totals occurred near Lake Michigan due to additional lake effect, where some areas ended up near 15 inches.

30) **March 18-19, 2005** – West-central – Winter Storm – 18 to 23 inches in a swath from southern Buffalo County to western Jackson County, with 12 to 15.6 inches in La Crosse County. The maximum of 23 inches occurred in northwestern Jackson County.

31) **November 15-16, 2005** – North – Winter Storm – An earlier season snow storm brought 8-17 inches of snow from Kingsford to Langlade to Hurley. Most of the snow fell by early the 16th with some lake effect snow off of Lake Superior later in the period.

29) **March 13-14, 2006** – West-central to Northcentral – Winter Storm – 17 to 32 inch of heavy, wet snow swath from St. Croix County northeast to Iron County. Thundersnow enhanced the accumulations. In Iron County, Gile measured 32 inches while Upson had 27 inches. In Ashland County, Mellen gathered 27 inches. Very poor visibility resulted from gusty winds around 30 mph, and drifting resulted in hundreds of accidents. Locals said it was the worst storm since the 1980s.

30) **February 23-26, 2007** – West-central through southern and eastern Wisconsin – Two-round storm, with one overnight the 23rd to 24th, and the second round overnight the 24th into the 25th. Leftover snow accumulations continued overnight the 25th into the 26th. In counties surrounding La Crosse, 8 to 15.6 inches (Galesville) fell in round one, while round two produced 6 to 12.5 inches (Sullivan NWS office) over the southern three-fourths of the state. The leftover snow added another 1 to 4 inches, except for 6 to 14 inches from New London into Door County. Many locations totaled 20 to 25 inches for this long-duration two-punch episode from around La Crosse to Port Washington, and a small part of Door County. Gusty winds generated snow drifts up to 5 to 7 feet in height.

31) **February 5-6, 2008** – Southern Wisconsin - Blizzard/Winter Storm - 10 to 21 inches. Greatest accumulations in southeastern Dane County through Rock County. In Orfordville and 9NW Beloit, 21 inches were measured. A major traffic backup occurred on Interstate 39/90 in the westbound lanes just south of where STH 51 intersects the Interstate in Dane County due to semi-tractor trailers jackknifing and blocking traffic on a hill. The backup started around 1030 CST to 1100 CST on February 6th and ended at daybreak on the 7th. This backup would eventually build south to near Janesville as stopped vehicles became drifted in. As many as 552 semi-trailers and 295 personal vehicles were involved in this backup for up to 10 to 20 hours. Additionally, a large backup occurred in the eastbound lanes in the same general area, involving 567 semi-trailers and 134 personal vehicles. Wind gusts to 35 to 43 knots (40 to 50 mph) affected most of the blizzard/winter storm area.

32) **March 21, 2008** – Southern Wisconsin – Winter Storm – 6 to 18.5 inches in a wide swath from La Crosse to the Milwaukee to Kenosha area. The West Bend-Port Washington-Milwaukee area picked up 12 to 18.5 inches. West Allis had high honors with 18.5 inches, 13 to 15 inches fell in the Kenosha area, and 14.8 inches piled up west of Beaver Dam. Some convective bands of heavy snow were reported.

33) **December 8-9, 2009** – Nearly statewide – Winter Storm – large area of 12 inches or more. Madison area had 17 to 20 inches, 15 to 17 inches in the La Crosse area, 14 to 16 inches in the Green Bay area, and 16 to 28 inches in the Lake Superior snow-belt. The greatest amount of around 28 inches occurred in

the Hurley, Iron County area. The lakeshore area from Sheboygan to Kenosha picked up 1 to 3 inches due to some rain.

34) **Dec 10-12, 2010** – Nearly statewide – Winter Storm/blizzard – large area of 6 to 23 inches. Maximum amounts of 16 to 23 inches in west-central to central Wisconsin. The 23 inches was measured in southwest Polk County. In the Eau Claire area 18 to 22 inches fell, while accumulations in La Crosse County ranged from 14 to 20.2 inches. Friendship, Adams Co., picked up 19.9 inches. There were reports of thundersnow. Northwest to north winds gusted to 30 to 50 mph with some whiteouts reported in exposed areas. Rain-snow-sleet mix southeast of a Janesville to Port Washington line limited accumulations to 1 to 5 inches in that part of the state.

35) **Feb 1-2, 2011** – Southeast half of state – Blizzard (gusts to 60 mph) – 8-24 inches across much of South and East Wisconsin, with 12-24 inches across extreme Southeast parts of the state. An additional 3-6 inches of snow had fallen on January 31st and into early February 1st, bringing three-day snow totals to around 1.5 to 2.5 feet...on up to 32.8 inches at Pella Lake, Walworth Co. Northeast winds gusted to 40-60 mph producing widespread whiteout conditions and significant drifting of snow. Snow drifts of 4 to 10 feet were reported. Numerous reports of thunder and lightning were noted with many cars stranded across area roadways, including Interstate 94 and 43 which were closed during the storm.

36) **March 22-23, 2011** – Northern and central portions of state – This late season winter storm resulted from a strong area of low pressure interacting with a cold air mass in place across the upper Midwest. Moderate to heavy snow fell late the 22nd, continuing into much of the day on the 23rd, bringing 5-10" of snow to the Northern half of the state. Thunderstorms developing in Iowa moved Northeast into colder air, resulting in locally heavy snow with numerous reports of thunder and lightning. This resulted in higher totals across Northeast parts of the state where 12-18 inches fell. Sleet and freezing rain mixed in for central parts of the state with some heavy ice accumulations. Gusty Easterly winds produced near blizzard conditions for Northeast parts of the state and also helped to bring down a 2,000 foot media broadcast tower near Eau Claire in combination with heavy ice accumulations. Green Bay recorded a two day storm total of 17.8 inches, the biggest snowstorm in over 120 years and the 3rd largest recorded snowstorm. In fact, this has resulted in the first winter Green Bay has had 3 major snowstorms producing 10 inches or more of accumulation!