



# How to Protect Facilities During the Winter Season

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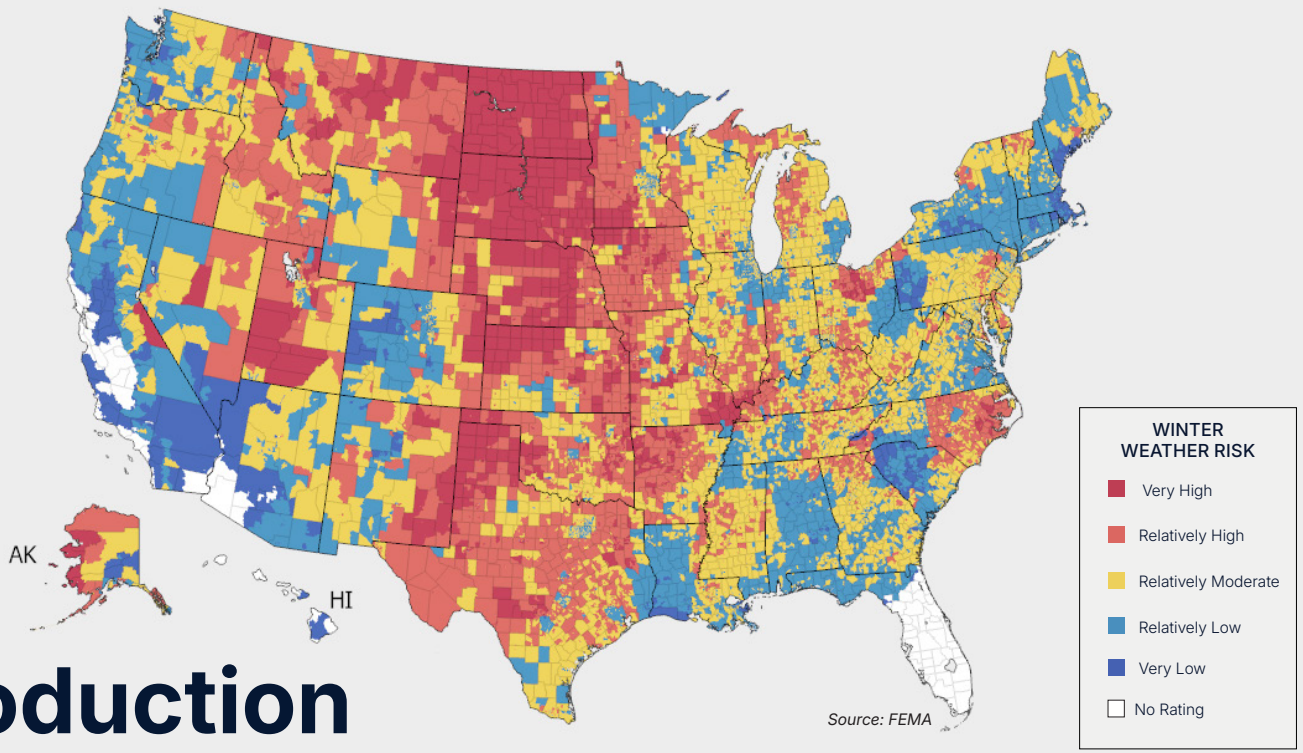
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# Introduction

Winter weather like snowstorms, blizzards, and freezing temperatures can place significant strain on businesses, jeopardizing operations, damaging infrastructure, and creating serious safety risks.

Though winter season property losses vary in form and severity, what remains constant are the personal and financial burdens of recovering after a disaster strikes. The average winter storm costs \$4.5 billion, while freezes cost \$4 billion on average, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

The key to minimizing losses is a layered preparation strategy. Facilities

must be hardened against seasonal hazards, employees must be prepared, and organizations must have established partnerships with recovery providers to respond quickly.

This whitepaper explains how property owners and managers can assess winter risks, strengthen their facilities, and protect their employees. It also outlines common hazards and offers actionable steps that businesses can take before, during, and after winter disasters to lessen the impact of storms and other catastrophes.



# Winter Storms: Heavy Snow, Blizzards, and Ice Storms

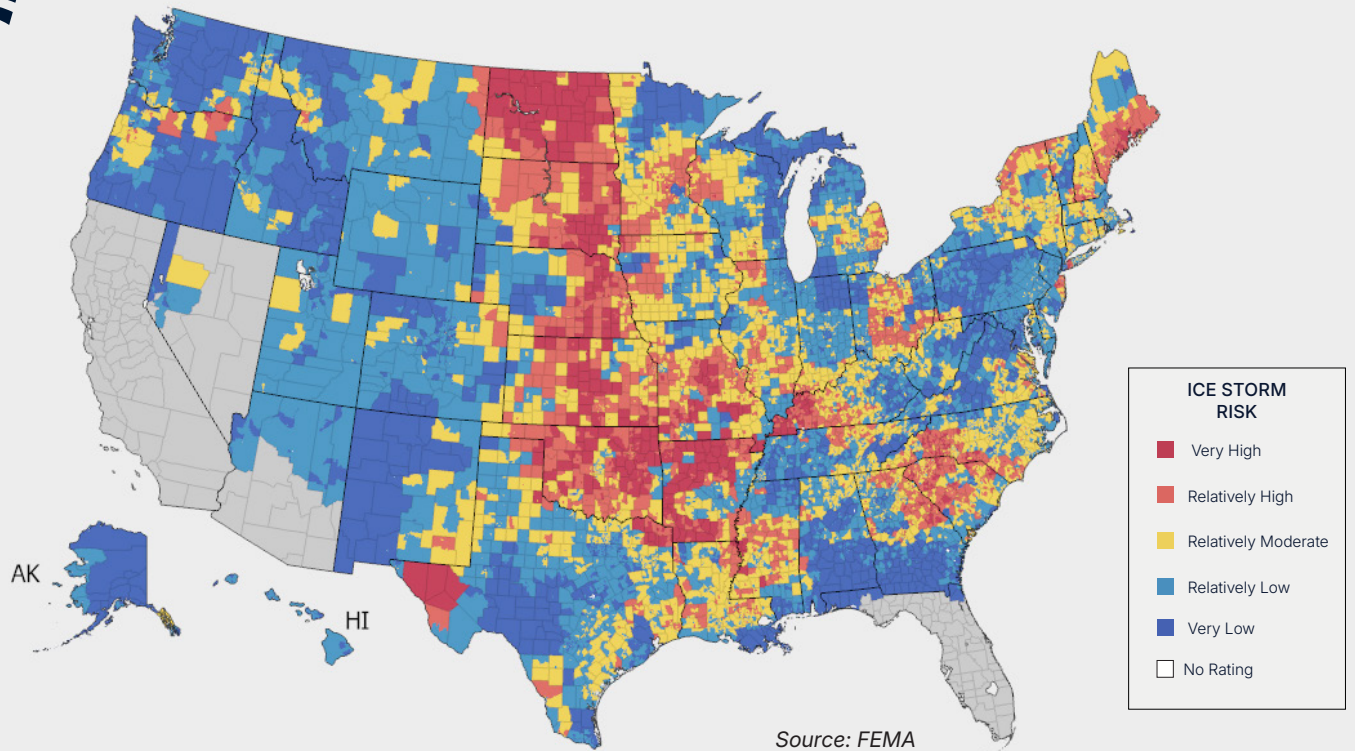
Winter storms are among the most disruptive hazards because they combine multiple risks at once, including snow, ice, wind, and freezing temperatures. Heavy snow can collapse roofs, shut down roads, and halt operations for days. Blizzards compound these risks with near-zero visibility and extreme wind chill. Ice storms are often even more destructive, coating power lines, trees, and structures with dense, heavy ice. Just a fraction of an inch of ice can disable entire communities, leading to widespread power outages, unsafe travel conditions, and business interruption.

For businesses, these storms create cascading risks: inaccessible facilities, unsafe working conditions, potential structural collapse, and stranded employees. Even if a facility escapes structural damage, prolonged closures and outages can erode revenue and customer confidence. Preparation must be proactive and ongoing, not reactive.

## 1

### BEFORE THE WINTER SEASON BEGINS

- Inspect insulation, caulking, and weatherstripping before winter. Repair cracks and leaks to keep cold air out.
- Document the snow load capacity of your facility's roof and plan for professional snow removal when storms exceed safe thresholds.
- Trim trees near structures to reduce the chance of falling limbs in high winds or ice accumulation.
- Service company vehicles in advance, checking batteries, tires, and antifreeze.
- Secure outdoor equipment, furniture, and vehicles to prevent damage from wind and ice.
- Take dated photos of the property to establish a condition record for insurance purposes.



## 2

### WHAT TO DO AFTER A STORM HITS

- Clear snow and ice from driveways, entrances, and emergency exits to restore safe access.
- Use salt or ice-melt products to prevent refreezing hazards.
- Engage qualified contractors for roof snow removal. A foot of wet snow can weigh up to 21 pounds, but the same foot of dry snow may only weigh 3 pounds.
- Remove icicles and snow-heavy limbs hanging over walkways and building entrances.
- Assess property damage thoroughly and notify employees about when and how operations will resume.
- Document property conditions with photos for insurance claims.



# Damaging Winds

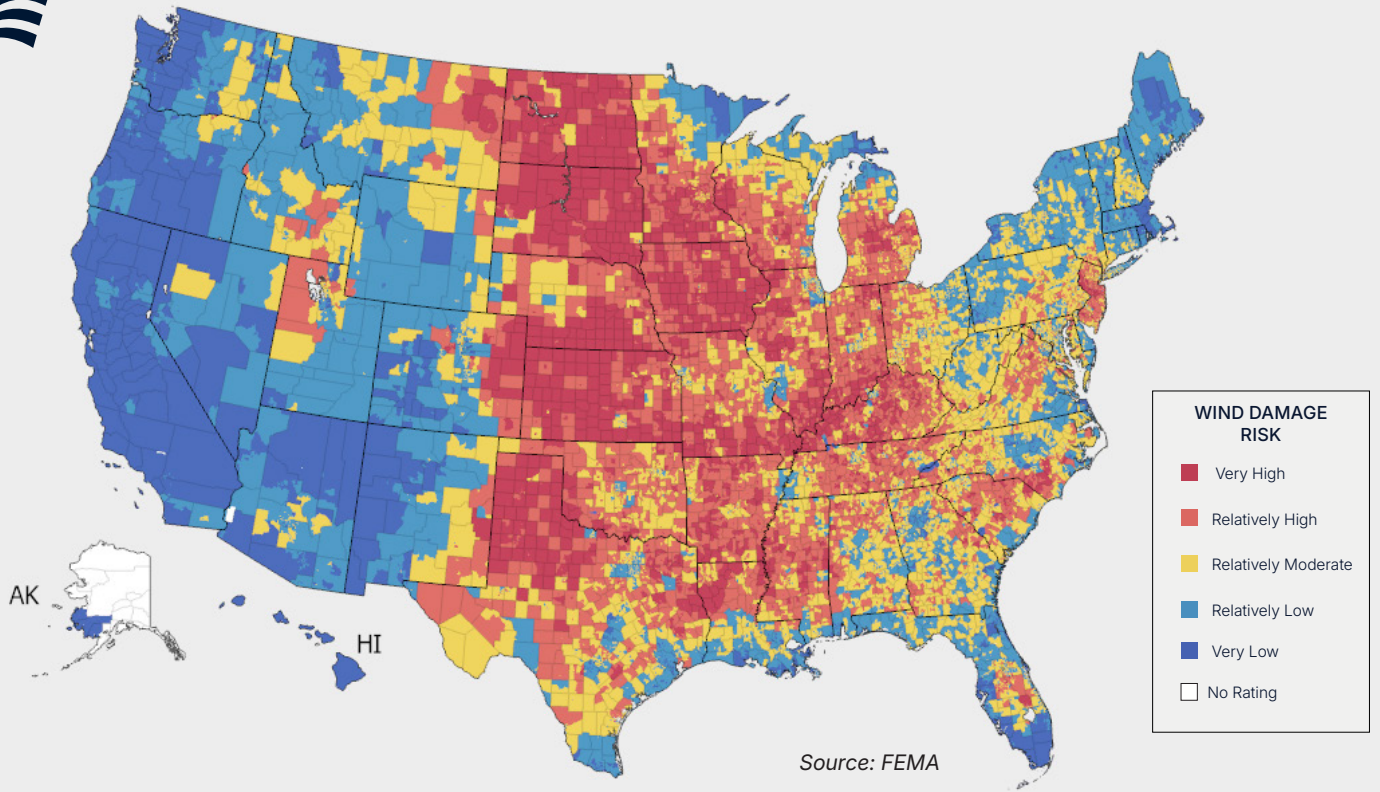
While snow and ice often get the most attention during the winter months, high winds are one of the most underestimated threats. Winds frequently accompany blizzards, nor'easters, and ice storms, amplifying their destructive power. Gusts can reach hurricane strength in some regions, tearing shingles from roofs, shattering windows, toppling signage, and driving debris into buildings. Even when winds are not extreme, sustained pressure can exploit small vulnerabilities in a structure, leading to escalating failures.

Wind damage is especially costly because it often triggers secondary hazards. Broken windows allow snow and freezing rain to enter buildings. Roof damage leads to water intrusion and ice dams. Flying debris can damage vehicles and HVAC units plus injure employees caught outdoors. Businesses located in urban areas must also consider liability from wind-driven debris that injures pedestrians or damages neighboring property.

## 1

### HOW TO PREPARE

- Inspect doors, windows, and roofing systems before winter to ensure they are properly sealed and reinforced.
- Secure latches and locks on all entry points. Consider upgrading to impact-resistant windows or storm shutters in high-risk areas.
- Trim back nearby trees and remove weak limbs that could snap under wind or ice load.
- Anchor or store loose outdoor materials, signage, and furniture to prevent them from becoming projectiles.
- Move company vehicles to a safe distance from buildings when strong winds are forecast.
- Take periodic photos of your facility for insurance documentation in case of storm-related claims.



## 2

### WHAT TO DO AFTER A HIGH-WIND EVENT

- Have a professional survey your roof for missing shingles, flashing, and signs of uplift.
- Inspect windows and door frames for cracks or misalignment.
- Remove debris carefully and look for damage to power lines, HVAC systems, and exterior signage.
- Engage professional restoration services if you see signs of water intrusion or structural compromise.





# Extremely Cold Temperatures

Extreme cold events can last anywhere from hours to days. They may test HVAC systems and piping, cause brittle materials to fracture, and compromise unprotected electronic equipment.

Burst pipes are one of the most common and costly consequences of winter weather. When water inside a pipe freezes, it expands, creating immense pressure that can rupture the pipe and release thousands of gallons of water in just minutes. The resulting flooding can damage walls, flooring, equipment, and inventory, often forcing businesses to close until repairs and restoration are complete.

Older buildings are particularly vulnerable, but even newer facilities can suffer damage if safeguards are not in place. Because bitter cold often arrives without warning, preparation is critical.

## 1

### HOW TO PREPARE

- Maintain indoor temperatures of at least 40°F where vulnerable systems are located.
- Wrap and insulate exposed or exterior-facing pipes to prevent heat loss.
- Close outdoor vents and leave interior doors open to allow heat circulation.
- Use caulking and weather stripping to keep the cold out.
- Allow cold water to drip from faucets in unheated areas or where pipes run on an exterior wall to relieve pressure buildup inside pipes.
- Install water alarms in high-risk areas such as under sinks, near boilers, and around appliances.



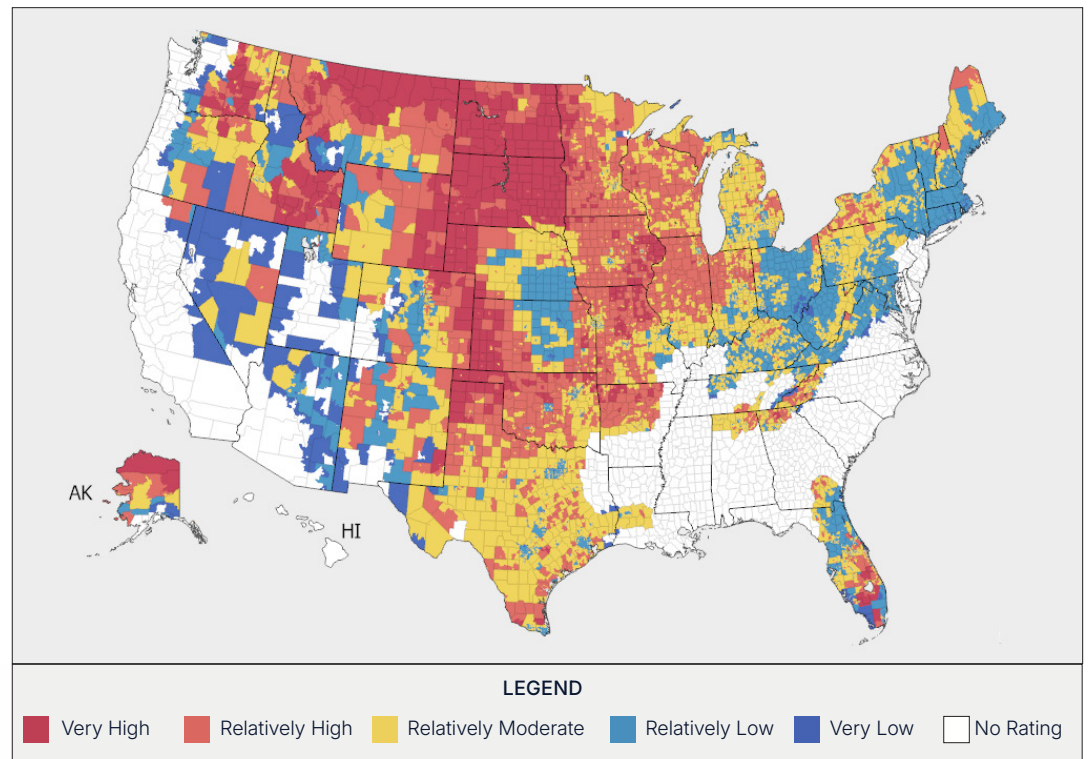
## 2

### HOW TO RESPOND IF A PIPE BURSTS

- Test HVAC systems and schedule preventative maintenance before the winter season.
- Protect electronics by keeping them in generator-backed or temperature-stable areas. Avoid leaving electronics in your car overnight. Move any sensitive computer equipment to an area protected by a generator.

- Shut off the main water supply immediately.
- Drain faucets (cold first, then hot) to relieve pressure and reduce freezing.
- Turn off heating systems and release pressure from hot taps.
- Begin documenting damage for insurance.
- Call your restoration provider immediately for water removal to minimize secondary water damage, such as mold growth.

### COLD WAVE RISK



Source: FEMA



# Landslides, Mudslides, and Avalanches

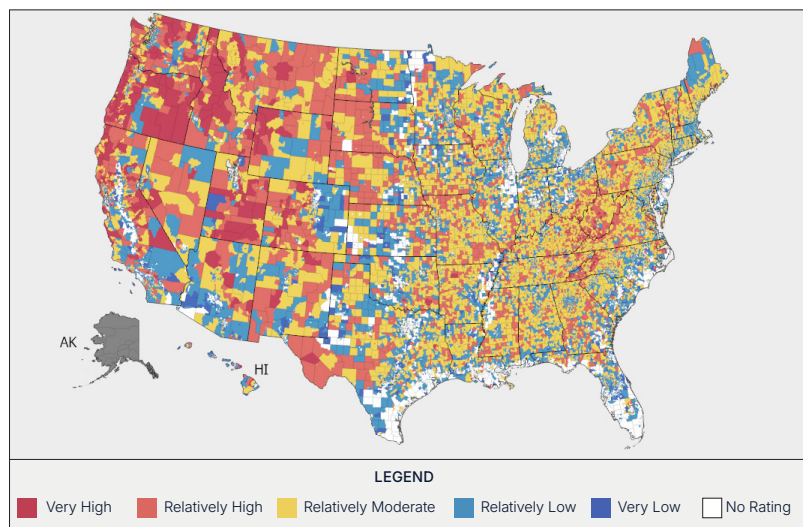
Though often overshadowed by storms and freezes, landslides, mudslides, and avalanches pose severe threats in certain areas. Heavy rains, melting snow, and wildfire burn scars destabilize slopes, making hillsides prone to collapse. When mud, rocks, and debris flow downslope, they can engulf buildings, block roads, and destroy infrastructure. In mountainous areas, avalanches triggered by rapid snowfall accumulation can have similar catastrophic effects.

## HOW TO PREPARE

- Develop and communicate evacuation plans specific to mudslide or avalanche risks.
- Build barriers, berms, or channels to redirect potential mud and debris flows away from buildings.
- Elevate utilities and critical equipment above flood or debris levels.
- Install backflow valves on drains to prevent contaminated water intrusion.
- After an event, have trained professionals inspect both the structure and the surrounding land for hidden damage.
- Limit contact with mud and floodwaters, which may contain hazardous materials.

These events are especially destructive because they strike suddenly and with immense force, leaving little time to react. Even businesses not directly hit may face supply chain disruptions, loss of access, or long-term closures if the surrounding infrastructure is damaged. Secondary risks, such as contaminated water, downed power lines, and hidden structural damage, add to the recovery challenge.

## LANDSLIDE RISK



Source: FEMA



# Preparing Employees for Winter Season Disasters

Winter events often disrupt commutes, isolate individuals at home, and expose outdoor workers to dangerous conditions. Employers must anticipate these risks and take proactive steps to protect their workforce. Employee readiness reduces panic during emergencies and keeps teams safe while operations stabilize. Here's what you can do to prepare for impending weather risks:

- Update employee contact information before the season begins.
- Provide clear policies for remote work when conditions make commuting unsafe.
- Inspect and maintain space heaters, generators, and backup lighting in physical offices.
- Supply outdoor employees with protective clothing and train them to recognize the symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Stock emergency kits with food, water, medications, sanitation items, and communication devices.
- Train employees on evacuation routes and the location of emergency supplies.
- Establish wellness checks after storms to confirm all staff are safe and accounted for.





# Where to Find Additional Resources

For more on winter preparedness, including emergency response planning and recovery strategies, ATI Restoration offers a library of whitepapers and learning resources. Visit [ATI's Learning Center](#) for resources on hurricanes, thunderstorms, and winter weather.

Government resources such as Ready.gov and the National Weather Service also provide valuable seasonal safety updates.

## UNIVERSAL WINTER READINESS CHECKLIST



**Review your insurance coverage.** Confirm that your policies include winter hazards. Adjust your coverage if needed.



**Service critical equipment.** Lubricate generators, snow blowers, and other cold-weather tools to ensure reliable operation.



**Maintain a list of emergency contacts.** Keep updated lists for employees, utilities, contractors, insurance agents, and your restoration partner.



**Plan for power outages.** Stock surge protectors, portable chargers, and, if feasible, invest in a generator.



**Document your property and assets.** Take dated photos of buildings, equipment, and grounds for easier claims documentation.



**Choose a trusted restoration provider.** Establish a partnership before disaster strikes for faster response, priority service, and less downtime after winter damage.



# Optimize Protection With Partners

Winter weather is unpredictable and unforgiving. Facilities that prepare for storms, freezing temperatures, and cascading risks like burst pipes or landslides are far more resilient in the face of disaster. But even with the best precautions, winter disasters can overwhelm businesses. Partnering with a trusted restoration provider before the season begins can dramatically reduce downtime.

ATI offers Emergency Response Agreements (ERAs) that guarantee priority service when widespread disasters strike. With pre-established terms and pricing, recovery begins immediately after a signed work

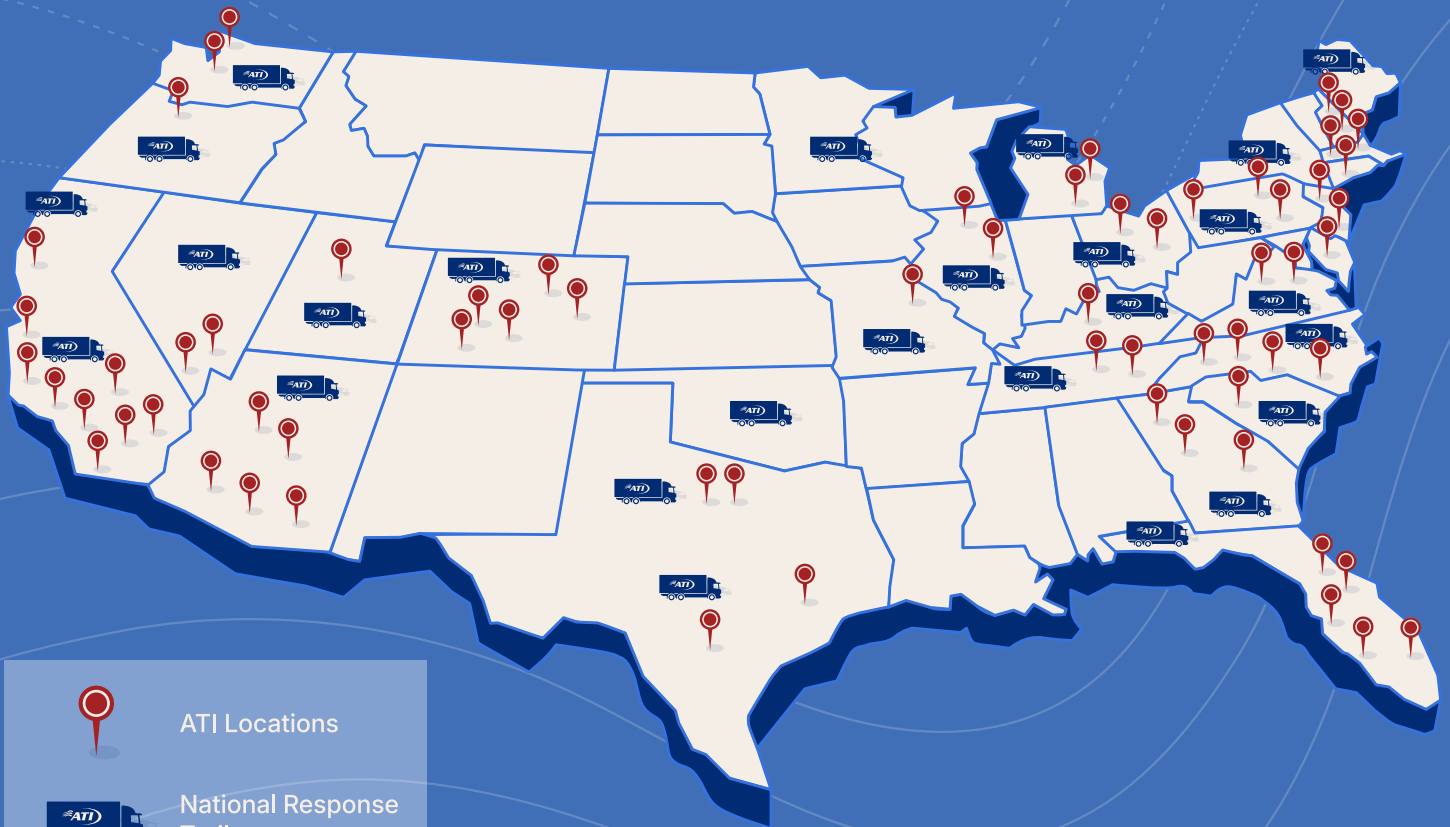
authorization, minimizing financial disruption and allowing companies to resume operations quickly.

This season, make sure your business is ready. Contact us today to learn how our recovery experts can help safeguard your people, property, and operations before the next winter storm strikes.



# With 70+ Locations Nationwide

ATI responds to major events and day-to-day  
emergencies across the U.S.



 ATI Locations

 National Response Trailers



## Contact Us

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