

Burke County Joint Information Center

Joint Press Release 828-764-9388

• Valdese • Rutherford College • Connelly Springs • Glen Alpine • Morganton • Burke County

For Immediate Release

January 21, 2026

Burke County and Municipal Leaders Prepare for Significant Winter Storm Impacting the Area This Weekend

KEY MESSAGES

1. Residents are strongly encouraged to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours. This includes having adequate water, non-perishable food, prescription medications, and necessary medical supplies. Residents who rely on oxygen should ensure they have backup oxygen available. If a patient using oxygen must go to a shelter or hospital, they must bring their own oxygen equipment with them.
2. Emergency management and local government leadership are prepared. County and municipal emergency management teams are actively coordinating and are ready to meet sheltering and warming needs if they arise. Plans are in place to open shelters or warming stations if necessary. Specific locations have not been announced at this time to ensure residents are directed to the most appropriate facilities based on where impacts occur.
3. Follow winter storm guidance before, during, and after the storm. Residents should prepare in advance, limit travel during the storm, and use caution once conditions improve. Power outages, hazardous road conditions, and extended cold are possible.

FULL STATEMENT

Burke County and the governments of Rhodhiss, Valdese, Rutherford College, Connelly Springs, Glen Alpine, and Morganton are working together in preparation for a significant winter weather event expected to impact the county beginning Saturday morning and continuing into early Monday.

Forecast guidance from the National Weather Service Greenville-Spartanburg indicates a prolonged period of winter precipitation lasting 36 to 48 hours, with snow, sleet, and

freezing rain expected across Burke County. While exact precipitation types and amounts are still being refined, there is high confidence that all precipitation will be frozen. This is not a rain event. There is no expectation of plain liquid rainfall during the core of this system.

The combination of cold surface temperatures and varying atmospheric layers aloft means precipitation may change types over time and vary by location. Even small shifts in temperature can significantly impact road conditions, power infrastructure, and emergency response operations. For that reason, local officials continue to rely on the National Weather Service and professional meteorologists as forecast details are refined.

This storm is expected to be impactful. Prolonged freezing precipitation increases the risk of dangerous travel conditions, scattered to widespread power outages, and extended response times for emergency services. Residents should prepare now, before conditions deteriorate.

State emergency preparedness guidance from ReadyNC emphasizes that winter storms can disrupt daily life for several days. Residents are encouraged to prepare homes, families, and vehicles ahead of time and to plan for potential isolation due to icy roads or loss of utilities.

Before the storm, residents should assemble emergency supplies, check heating systems, insulate exposed pipes, and make arrangements for pets and vulnerable family members. A plan should be in place to communicate with family members if normal communication systems are disrupted.

During the storm, residents should stay off the roads unless absolutely necessary. Travel during snow, sleet, or freezing rain is extremely dangerous and places both the public and first responders at risk. If power is lost, use generators, heaters, and fireplaces safely and never operate fuel-burning devices indoors or in enclosed spaces.

After the storm, continue to use caution even if precipitation has ended. Roads may remain icy, trees and power lines may be weakened, and temperatures may remain dangerously cold. Check on neighbors, especially the elderly or those with medical needs, and report hazards to local authorities.

Emergency management and municipal leadership across Burke County remain in close coordination and will continue monitoring conditions around the clock. Shelters and warming locations can be activated if needed, and public messaging will be adjusted based on evolving impacts. Shelter locations will be announced if and when activation becomes necessary to ensure residents are directed to the safest and most appropriate facilities.

Officials strongly encourage residents to stay informed through official weather forecasts, local government messaging, and trusted emergency management sources. Preparation now will reduce risk and help ensure the safety of the entire community during this winter weather event.

If you are a City of Morganton resident, please visit their website for more winter weather-related information at <https://www.morgantonnc.gov>

If you are a Town of Valdese resident, please visit their website for more winter weather-related information at <https://www.townofvaldese.com>

If you are a Town of Rutherford College resident, please visit their website for more information at <https://www.rutherfordcollegenc.us/>

If you are a Town of Connelly Springs resident, please visit their website for more information at <https://www.connellysprings.gov/>

If you are a Town of Glen Alpine resident, please visit their website for more information at <https://www.townofglenalpine.org/>

All Burke County Residents can visit the county's website at <https://www.burkenc.org>

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