

Shipping companies brace for harsh winter weather with 'contingency plans' to help gifts arrive on time for the holidays

Despite predicted inclement weather, carriers will ship a combined 100 million packages per day this week leading up to Christmas.



A UPS worker delivers packages during a snow storm in Detroit, on Feb. 3.

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By Antonio Planas, NBC News

With inclement winter weather forecasted for much of the country this week, New Hampshire resident Laurie Boswell said she can sleep easy because she sent her Californian daughter's Christmas gift with time to spare during the busy shipping season.

"I did all my Christmas ordering early — we don't like to miss," said Boswell, 67, who is from Franconia, New Hampshire, but spoke Tuesday from midtown Manhattan.

Present procrastinators, however, Boswell said, who shipped gifts to their love ones this week may not be so lucky.

“Regardless of the storm, you could still be in trouble,” she said. “You don’t want any last-minute glitches that could ruin the holidays.”

Satish Jindel, founder and president of [ShipMatrix](#) Inc, which tracks the shipping industry and its efficiency, said carriers like Amazon, FedEx, UPS and the U.S. Postal Service, will be shipping on average a combined 100 million packages per day this week leading up to Christmas.

“That’s a lot of packages moving all across the country,” Jindel said.

He added during a typical day in the fall, about 70 million packages per day are shipped.

Jindel said this year during their busiest season, carriers face the additional obstacle of working around Mother Nature’s wrath.

[A blast of Arctic air from Canada](#) is expected to bring “life-threatening” cold to parts of the United States in the lead-up to Christmas, weather forecasters have warned.

A strong arctic, high-pressure system extending from western Canada to the northern Plains is expected to bring “very cold air” across the region, while extending into parts of the Pacific Northwest this week, the National Weather Service said. As of Tuesday morning, 46 million people were under winter alerts stretching from the northern Plains into the Ohio Valley.

Wind chill warnings and watches have been put in place across 17 states from Washington to Texas because of the cold weather.

Jindel said the country saw similarly frigid conditions shortly before Christmas in 2013. Packages arrived late or not at all, he said.

That year, [freezing ice storms plunged homes and businesses from Michigan to Maine and Canada](#) into darkness causing tens of thousands to lose power.

“This is a reminder of what happened the final Christmas week of 2013,” Jindel said.

Shipping carriers, however, learned to monitor the weather and work around clusters of storms by sending packages to areas that were more hospitable in order to get to their final destinations, he said.

Jindel expects packages to arrive this week by when the carriers said they will.

He said however, the late gift-senders might have to pay a premium to get presents to their destinations.

“They can wait till Friday, and order it express overnight, but then they’ll pay \$70 or \$80 for a gift that is worth \$20,” Jindel said. “That is the price of procrastination.”

According to statements from UPS, FedEx, Amazon and the U.S. Postal Service, their workers are ready for harsh weather.

“UPS has a team of full-time meteorologists who monitor the weather and help us create contingency plans as winter storms develop. Our drivers are trained to safely make deliveries, and if we cannot safely deliver to an area, we will resume service as soon as conditions permit,” the company said.

FedEx also said it has “contingency plans in place to help keep our team members safe and lessen any impact on service.” The company encouraged customers to check for weather disruptions affecting service at its [website](#).

Sam Stephenson, an Amazon spokesperson said in a statement: “We’re closely monitoring reports of inclement weather across the U.S. Our delivery promises factor in forecasted weather and delivery dates are shown transparently at checkout. For customers making a last-minute purchase, look for an ‘arrive by Christmas’ message on the product page to ensure the item will make it under the tree by 12/24.”

The U.S. Postal Service said it plans for “various weather issues throughout the year.” The postal service also said its workers have the proper equipment to do their jobs safely. While the three companies declined to share figures on how many packages are sent this week, the postal service said customer traffic begins increasing the week of Dec. 5., culminating the week of Dec. 12, which marks the “busiest mailing, shipping and delivery week of the season.”

Amazon has fulfilled hundreds of millions of orders this holiday season, the company said.

Veronika Bo, 29, of New York City, spoke Tuesday from a post office in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan.

Bo said she has shipped holiday gifts to friends and family all over the country, including California, Colorado and Florida.

She said she never worries if her packages will arrive by Christmas.

“As long as it is postmarked before December 25, you’re fine,” Bo said. “That shows that you’re late, but you’re still thinking about them.”