

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

There's Water In Them Hills

Snow gives us skiing in the winter and rafting in the summer. It is a critical element of the water cycle; as much as 75% of the water supply in the western United States comes from melting snow. It helps drive the Spring flows in the Boise River and can provide the total flow for smaller, unregulated streams and creeks that flow in and around the community. These flows vary from year to year depending on the amount of snow in the mountains and the Spring weather.

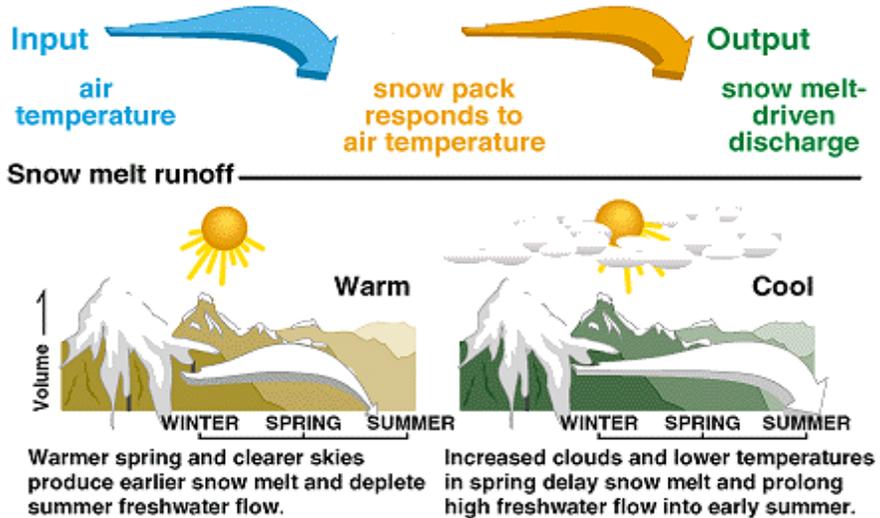


Diagram Credit : sfbay.wr.usgs.gov

From Flow To Flood

Most years in the Treasure Valley, the relationship between the snowpack and the spring weather is a good one. Runoff flows are handled by the reservoirs, rivers and creeks without causing major flooding. But these favorable conditions do not exist every year. The following factors can help create snowmelt flooding:

- ✱ Very moist soil prior to the snowmelt: Fall rains can soak the soil and cool weather can keep the ground from drying out. This limits how much moisture the ground can absorb.
- ✱ Frozen soil or ground frost: Frozen ground will prevent water infiltration into the soil.
- ✱ Heavy winter snow cover: More snow equals more water. If the heavy snow is widespread, it will keep the air cool and the snow may stay later in the year. This snow is then susceptible to the next two issues.
- ✱ Rain-on-snow events: Widespread rain during the snowmelt will warm up the snowpack and increase the flow to rivers and streams. The combination of rain and snowmelt can cause flash flooding.
- ✱ Rapid snowmelt: Snowmelt rates are normally similar to a light to moderate rainfall. However, a sudden warming trend with nighttime temperatures above freezing can create much higher melt rates.

In addition to flooding, rapid snowmelt can cause landslides, debris flows and contribute to ice jams.

Take The First Step Towards Being Prepared ... Be Aware

The internet has made it much easier for all of us to access information that was once only available to professional forecasters. The following sites will provide useful information on snow melt.

[IDWR—Snow/Water Equivalent](#)

[Idaho SNOTEL Snow/Water Equivalent](#)

[National Weather Service Hydrological Prediction Service](#)

These websites will allow to you monitor the snowpack in the mountains and the river flows in the valleys. Keeping a “weather eye” on your environment will help you see a potential disaster before it arrives.

You can better develop your “weather eye” by learning to be a [Weather Spotter](#). The next class in Ada County will be: **When: Wednesday, April 25, 2012 from 7pm to 9pm**

Where: Public Safety Building, 7200 Barrister Drive, Boise. Meet in the Lobby no later than 7pm.

