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Special Report: Winter Storm Fern – Impact Overview

January 28, 2026

Overview

Winter Storm Fern prompted consumers to stock up and hunker down, triggering an economic shock across the United States, according to a Fiserv Small Business Index analysis covering January 23–26, 2026. Across 18 cities, grocery and retail activity spiked on Friday and ahead of the storm, before snowfall, ice and plunging temperatures restricted mobility through Monday. Restaurant activity, by contrast, collapsed over the weekend, especially in the Southern and Mid-Atlantic markets hit hardest by widespread icing, power outages and dangerous roads. Cross-referenced with national reporting on Fern's path, the data reveal clear dynamics: blizzard-tested Northeastern cities weathered the storm with less severe downturns than Southern cities overwhelmed by ice. This four-day snapshot was based on year-over-year changes in sales, transactions and the number of businesses that remained open. We align same day of week year over year to get a true picture of demand impact (ex. Saturday, January 24, 2026 vs Saturday January 25, 2025), Our analysis underscores how the specific weather hazards were the primary factor shaping small business performance during this storm.

Highlights

1. **Households stocked up on the Friday before the storm.** Grocery sales jumped across many metros compared with the same time last year, led by Nashville (+113%), Dallas (+105%), Baltimore (+105%), Raleigh (+102%), Philadelphia (+84% to +87% across a region spanning parts of PA, NJ, DE and MD), and New York City (+53%). The surge came ahead of the worst weekend conditions and matched guidance to prepare early for snow, ice and extreme cold.

2. **Retail rose on Friday from increased activity in building materials, gas stations, general merchandise, and from explosive growth at grocery.** Retail sales climbed in New York (+37%), Philadelphia (+46%), Boston (+33%), Houston (+32%), Dallas (+34%) and Charlotte (+32%). Households loaded up on both staples and general goods ahead of the weekend.

3. **The Southern ice belt saw the sharpest weekend pullback.** From Saturday into Sunday, grocery and retail fell hardest in Dallas, Charlotte, Raleigh, Nashville, Memphis, and San Antonio, which aligns with widespread icing, hazardous roads and significantly less experience with wintry conditions.

4. **New York, Philadelphia, and Boston showed strong Friday and Saturday stock-ups followed by deep Sunday or Monday declines under heavy snow and dangerous cold.** Grocery in Philadelphia fell −73% on Sunday and remained down −48% Monday after a Friday spike. Similarly, New York saw a −38% drop in grocery sales on Sunday, followed by a −37% drop on Monday. Boston grocery fell −59% Monday after strong gains earlier.

5. **Houston faced an easier path than Dallas.** Houston grocery rose +76% Friday and +43% Saturday, before easing −37% Sunday and −28% Monday. Dallas went from a Friday surge (+105%) to steep declines by Saturday (−45%), Sunday (−69%), and Monday (−37%). The contrast between the two cities is consistent with coverage that Houston's city core avoided icing as rain tapered off well before freezing temperatures settled in.

6. **Markets more accustomed to winter storms performed better.** Chicago and Detroit grocery sales were steadier on Friday (up only +3% to +4% in both markets), and evidence that shoppers here were already acclimated to the conditions and less in need of stocking up. Grocery in these markets softened through the weekend (down -18% to -23%), but without the collapses seen farther south, and Chicago grocery even ticked higher on Monday.

7. **Denver held near flat through Sunday.** With a weather system that placed the most disruptive hazards east and south of the Rockies, grocery and retail in Denver were stable on Friday and Saturday. A major football contest hosted in Denver on Sunday likely helped to stem a deeper downturn on restaurant sales (dipped only -6.9% and was the best performance among all cities reviewed) and made Denver the only observed city to deliver growth for grocery (+7.4%) on Sunday.

8. **Outlet counts stayed largely steady, so sales declines can be attributed to demand suppression, not mass small business closures.** For example, New York grocery outlets were up +3.9% year over year for all four days, as were Houston (+3.3%), Charlotte (+3.9%), and Raleigh (+10.4%). The declines line up with official requests to stay off roads during the worst icing and cold.

9. **Large grocery surges on Friday were often followed by sharp Sunday collapses.** Raleigh jumped +102% Friday, then fell −77% Sunday. Nashville rose +113% on Friday, then dropped −70% Sunday. Dallas climbed +105% Friday before a −69% fall on Sunday. These results suggest a significant pull-forward of essential purchases before travel became risky.

10. **Philadelphia and Baltimore exemplified a stock-then-stop strategy at small business.** Grocery and retail spiked on Friday, then dropped sharply on Sunday and Monday as the cities dug out of heavy snowfall and officials emphasized safety. Federal assistance for Maryland further underscores the severity.

11. **Boston's Monday slump was the deepest among the Northeast cities measured.** Grocery fell −59% and overall retail fell −68% on Monday following a snowy Sunday and difficult cleanup afterward. News outlets in the area pointed to record-setting snowfalls and persistent transit interruptions.

12. **Charlotte and Raleigh showed typical storm-induced consumer response.** Friday and Saturday's stock-ups were followed by very large Sunday and Monday declines in both grocery and retail. The number of outlets open remained relatively unchanged, suggesting that consumer mobility, not business closures, was the primary constraint.

13. **Kansas City followed a similar pattern seen in other midwestern cities.** Grocery rose +64% on Friday, then fell −46% on Saturday and −64% on Sunday, with retail moving in the same direction. That was consistent with the broader progression of the heaviest snowfall starting after Friday and lingering cold over the weekend in the central states.

14. **After steep weekend declines, San Antonio recovered more quickly than other major Texas markets.** Grocery in San Antonio narrowed to −23% Monday after −44% Sunday, aligning with reports that the most persistent icing and outages concentrated north and northeast of South Texas.

Implications for consumer spending at small businesses

- **Overall grocery sales grew faster than transactions.** Households pulled demand forward into Friday, especially for staples. Instead of more trips, consumers filled bigger baskets.

- **Dining dollars evaporated when roads iced over and travel was interrupted.** Even in markets where restaurants stayed open, foot traffic collapsed at a rate largely comparable with sales. Average tickets suggest that patrons didn't substantially alter their order sizes. .

- **Spending recovery lagged the snow.** By Monday, much of the snowfall had stopped, but spending remained deeply negative in many Northeast/Mid-Atlantic cities (e.g., Boston, NYC, Philadelphia and Baltimore restaurants were still down −43% to −64%) as cleanup and extreme cold kept people shuttered at home.

Summary

Winter Storm Fern drove a significant pull-forward in small business for grocery/retail on Friday, followed by weekend restaurant collapses that were more severe in states caught in the Southern ice band (Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina). In the Northeast, depressed sales extended into Monday, where heavy snow and bitter cold slowed recovery. This geographic split tracks closely ice-driven road hazards and power failures in the South versus plowable snow in the Northeast. These outcomes suggest that metro-area size itself played almost no role. Winter storm-tested markets with the infrastructure to handle snow and ice events fared better than those areas that rarely see such severe weather, like many of the Southern markets.

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SOURCE: FISERV SMALL BUSINESS INDEX COVERING FRIDAY JANUARY 23, 2026 THROUGH MONDAY JANUARY 26, 2026.

RESTAURANTS

MARKETS	Storm Fri Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Outlets % Chg YoY
35620-New York-Newark-Jersey City NY-NJ-PA	-0.6%	0.7%	1.0%	-7.7%	-8.1%	1.0%	-48.3%	-52.3%	1.0%	-45.7%	-47.8%	1.0%
16980-Chicago-Naperville-Elgin IL-IN-WI	-11.4%	-18.4%	0.6%	-21.0%	-17.5%	0.6%	-23.5%	-21.4%	0.6%	-8.5%	-5.6%	0.6%
19100-Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington TX	-1.7%	-6.8%	1.9%	-71.8%	-75.4%	1.9%	-91.6%	-92.4%	1.9%	-69.6%	-77.9%	1.9%
12060-Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta GA	-6.7%	-5.8%	-1.5%	-21.8%	-21.1%	-1.5%	-74.5%	-73.6%	-1.5%	-39.0%	-42.1%	-1.5%
26420-Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land TX	-2.0%	-2.2%	-2.3%	-14.5%	-17.9%	-2.3%	-62.0%	-60.2%	-2.3%	-38.3%	-39.9%	-2.3%
14460-Boston-Cambridge-Newton MA-NH	-7.4%	-2.3%	-2.5%	-11.9%	-7.8%	-2.5%	-43.5%	-37.2%	-2.5%	-58.8%	-61.0%	-2.5%
37980-Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington PA-NJ-DE-MD	-3.5%	-1.8%	-0.8%	-8.3%	-7.1%	-0.8%	-68.5%	-74.9%	-0.8%	-57.7%	-62.3%	-0.8%
19820-Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MI	-11.9%	-36.1%	-0.5%	-17.0%	-29.0%	-0.5%	-33.3%	-41.6%	-0.5%	-20.6%	-43.1%	-0.5%
41700-San Antonio-New Braunfels TX	-4.2%	-4.8%	-3.3%	-27.5%	-27.6%	-3.3%	-68.2%	-66.9%	-3.3%	-21.7%	-31.9%	-3.3%
12580-Baltimore-Columbia-Towson MD	-4.1%	0.3%	2.7%	-6.3%	-5.1%	2.7%	-75.4%	-80.3%	2.7%	-64.0%	-70.9%	2.7%
19740-Denver-Aurora-Lakewood CO	-7.8%	-7.3%	-0.1%	-15.7%	-9.0%	-0.1%	-6.9%	-6.1%	-0.1%	-11.4%	-13.4%	-0.1%
16740-Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia NC-SC	-0.4%	1.2%	-1.2%	-15.8%	-14.5%	-1.2%	-81.1%	-81.4%	-1.2%	-51.2%	-58.5%	-1.2%
34980-Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin TN	-8.1%	-3.9%	1.1%	-51.2%	-56.4%	1.1%	-87.6%	-87.8%	1.1%	-50.2%	-69.1%	1.1%
26900-Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson IN	-1.1%	-2.1%	-0.1%	-19.5%	-18.7%	-0.1%	-77.4%	-80.0%	-0.1%	-49.4%	-55.2%	-0.1%
38300-Pittsburgh PA	-7.4%	-7.1%	-0.3%	-13.9%	-16.6%	-0.3%	-73.8%	-79.4%	-0.3%	-61.2%	-67.3%	-0.3%
39580-Raleigh-Cary NC	-1.7%	1.8%	2.6%	-17.6%	-14.6%	2.6%	-87.6%	-88.3%	2.6%	-55.1%	-59.7%	2.6%
32820-Memphis TN-MS-AR	-6.1%	-6.9%	-3.4%	-63.3%	-69.0%	-6.0%	-91.9%	-93.8%	-3.4%	-77.3%	-86.7%	-3.4%
28140-Kansas City MO-KS	-4.5%	-9.4%	1.7%	-58.4%	-61.4%	1.7%	-68.8%	-65.5%	1.7%	-11.9%	-21.3%	1.7%

GROCERY

MARKETS	Storm Fri Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Outlets % Chg YoY
35620-New York-Newark-Jersey City NY-NJ-PA	53.1%	25.4%	3.9%	59.3%	26.3%	3.9%	-38.3%	-32.3%	3.9%	-37.0%	-33.1%	3.9%
16980-Chicago-Naperville-Elgin IL-IN-WI	4.0%	-0.3%	16.5%	-5.9%	-7.2%	16.5%	-17.8%	-14.9%	16.5%	2.2%	1.2%	16.5%
19100-Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington TX	104.6%	69.4%	2.3%	-44.9%	-43.3%	2.3%	-69.0%	-65.4%	2.3%	-38.6%	-34.2%	2.3%
12060-Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta GA	53.5%	31.3%	4.2%	26.7%	20.9%	4.2%	-52.7%	-45.8%	4.2%	-25.3%	-19.4%	4.2%
26420-Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land TX	76.2%	47.7%	3.3%	42.7%	34.6%	3.3%	-36.7%	-25.9%	3.3%	-27.5%	-19.2%	3.3%
14460-Boston-Cambridge-Newton MA-NH	43.3%	24.1%	3.7%	44.6%	24.8%	3.7%	-17.7%	-16.9%	3.7%	-59.4%	-52.8%	3.7%
37980-Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington PA-NJ-DE-MD	84.3%	44.7%	13.5%	39.3%	30.3%	13.5%	-73.2%	-62.3%	13.5%	-48.0%	-37.5%	13.5%
19820-Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MI	3.6%	1.0%	5.4%	3.5%	-0.8%	5.4%	-23.5%	-20.6%	5.4%	-2.9%	-4.7%	5.4%
41700-San Antonio-New Braunfels TX	64.1%	43.2%	1.2%	26.1%	21.0%	1.2%	-44.3%	-36.1%	1.2%	-23.1%	-4.2%	1.2%
12580-Baltimore-Columbia-Towson MD	105.1%	53.1%	8.4%	65.3%	42.3%	8.4%	-64.2%	-54.7%	8.4%	-48.0%	-39.6%	8.4%
19740-Denver-Aurora-Lakewood CO	6.6%	-7.7%	-2.4%	6.6%	5.2%	-2.4%	7.4%	2.5%	-2.4%	-14.1%	-7.6%	-2.4%
16740-Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia NC-SC	68.6%	46.5%	3.9%	29.4%	24.2%	3.9%	-67.0%	-63.9%	3.9%	-23.8%	-22.9%	3.9%
34980-Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin TN	113.2%	63.5%	1.6%	-5.8%	-15.0%	1.6%	-69.5%	-68.7%	1.6%	-29.8%	-35.1%	1.6%
26900-Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson IN	45.5%	24.5%	13.6%	9.5%	7.9%	13.6%	-70.1%	-67.3%	13.6%	-27.1%	-27.5%	13.6%
38300-Pittsburgh PA	87.7%	51.9%	7.2%	45.1%	36.2%	7.2%	-82.5%	-74.0%	7.2%	-50.4%	-43.4%	7.2%
39580-Raleigh-Cary NC	102.2%	70.3%	10.4%	38.4%	33.8%	10.4%	-77.1%	-72.6%	10.4%	-39.1%	-32.2%	10.4%
32820-Memphis TN-MS-AR	85.8%	48.7%	6.7%	-25.6%	-22.3%	6.7%	-60.7%	-54.1%	6.7%	-17.9%	-16.5%	6.7%
28140-Kansas City MO-KS	64.1%	41.5%	-2.3%	-45.6%	-41.6%	-2.3%	-64.5%	-58.0%	-2.3%	-18.4%	-10.0%	-2.3%

RETAIL

MARKETS	Storm Fri Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Fri Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sat Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Sun Outlets % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Sales % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Trans % Chg YoY	Storm Mon Outlets % Chg YoY
35620-New York-Newark-Jersey City NY-NJ-PA	36.7%	24.6%	0.8%	35.2%	24.7%	0.8%	-46.4%	-36.3%	0.5%	-41.9%	-34.5%	0.8%
16980-Chicago-Naperville-Elgin IL-IN-WI	-14.0%	-2.6%	1.4%	-12.6%	-9.7%	1.4%	-20.9%	-16.4%	1.4%	-4.2%	-1.5%	1.4%
19100-Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington TX	33.8%	43.2%	-1.5%	-63.7%	-52.4%	-1.5%	-69.6%	-66.7%	-3.0%	-55.4%	-44.9%	-1.5%
12060-Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta GA	13.8%	18.1%	-2.0%	-0.4%	6.0%	-2.0%	-60.2%	-51.5%	-2.0%	-41.0%	-26.3%	-2.0%
26420-Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land TX	31.5%	40.9%	-1.7%	9.6%	23.6%	-1.7%	-39.7%	-28.0%	-1.7%	-39.5%	-26.3%	-1.7%
14460-Boston-Cambridge-Newton MA-NH	32.5%	25.0%	-0.3%	28.5%	26.7%	-0.4%	-24.9%	-21.5%	-0.2%	-67.7%	-56.7%	-0.4%
37980-Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington PA-NJ-DE-MD	45.6%	42.5%	3.3%	28.5%	33.3%	3.3%	-68.3%	-61.4%	1.9%	-56.4%	-43.5%	3.3%
19820-Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MI	2.3%	-0.5%	-0.3%	0.7%	-2.5%	-0.3%	-23.8%	-21.2%	-0.3%	-9.4%	-4.9%	-0.3%
41700-San Antonio-New Braunfels TX	21.0%	28.3%	-2.5%	-13.2%	3.2%	-2.5%	-53.9%	-42.0%	-4.8%	-25.7%	-10.1%	-2.6%
12580-Baltimore-Columbia-Towson MD	61.9%	48.4%	0.9%	41.4%	39.0%	0.9%	-64.2%	-55.9%	-2.4%	-59.2%	-44.6%	0.6%
19740-Denver-Aurora-Lakewood CO	5.9%	-7.4%	-1.5%	9.1%	6.4%	-1.5%	-0.7%	0.6%	-1.5%	-3.0%	-8.1%	-1.5%
16740-Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia NC-SC	31.5%	36.7%	2.9%	1.1%	15.6%	2.1%	-70.3%	-66.3%	2.0%	-53.9%	-34.1%	2.8%
34980-Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin TN	66.1%	60.1%	1.3%	-35.5%	-22.5%	0.3%	-70.2%	-68.8%	-7.8%	-55.8%	-41.3%	0.5%
26900-Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson IN	10.3%	16.5%	2.1%	-13.5%	2.0%	2.1%	-71.7%	-67.4%	-3.2%	-51.9%	-37.6%	2.1%
38300-Pittsburgh PA	55.6%	54.2%	0.8%	23.0%	34.0%	0.5%	-80.0%	-71.8%	2.1%	-56.9%	-43.7%	0.6%
39580-Raleigh-Cary NC	42.3%	49.0%	3.3%	9.3%	21.9%	3.3%	-77.8%	-70.6%	-7.1%	-60.8%	-42.4%	1.2%
32820-Memphis TN-MS-AR	26.3%	32.2%	3.1%	-51.2%	-33.1%	1.0%	-63.4%	-56.3%	-6.4%	-52.1%	-32.4%	-2.9%
28140-Kansas City MO-KS	13.5%	25.1%	-3.0%	-60.1%	-47.9%	-2.8%	-63.5%	-57.6%	-3.4%	-29.1%	-15.6%	-3.0%