Factories bounce back with robust

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Output from the nation's factories bounced back robustly after brutal winter storms caused sharp declines in production in January.

Manufacturers assembled more vehicles and home electronics and produced more chemicals, the Federal Reserve said Monday.

Government data showed that factory production rose 0.8 percent for the month, compared with a 0.9 percent decline in January that economists said was primarily weather related.

The gain in February was the best in six months, and suggests to economists that factories should boost output as the weather warms.

The February number indicates that manufacturing, the primary component of the report, "is not down for the count," said Wells Fargo economist Tim Quinlan.

"One of the big questions we have been getting recently involves whether or not we will see some "payback" for the lousy weather," Quinlan said.

"If you needed a new car and decided that the middle of a blizzard was a bad time to go to the dealership, our guess is you will go back when the weather improves.

"In other words, auto sales is one area where we would expect to see payback, although auto sales were losing momentum before the wintry weather began in earnest."

The Institute for Supply Management said earlier this month that manufacturers got more orders in February even as production was falling, an indicator for future factory activity.

production in February