

Winter Storm

Winter can be an invigorating season. It can also be hazardous and unpredictable. Since winter weather conditions change frequently and rapidly, one should be prepared. To keep you and your family safe this winter, take a few minutes to review the everyday precautions that follow.

Understanding Terms Used To Describe Winter Storms

A *winter weather advisory* is issued when winter weather conditions, such as cold, ice, and snow, are expected to hinder travel, cause significant inconveniences or create other types of hazardous conditions.

A *winter storm watch* means that severe weather is possible.

A *winter storm warning* means that a heavy snow, sleet or freezing rain are expected.

A *blizzard warning* means that heavy snow, winds and dangerously low temperatures are expected. A blizzard can cause severe weather conditions such as zero visibility and life-threatening wind chill.

Freezing rain is forecasted when expected rain is likely to freeze as it strikes the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads and walkways.

Sleet is rain that freezes into ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet causes roads to freeze and become slippery.

Preparation

Keep a battery-powered NOAA weather radio and portable radio in working order; stock extra batteries.

Store food that can be prepared without an electric or gas stove.

Stock emergency water and cooking supplies.

Store rock salt to melt ice on walkways and kitty litter to temporarily generate traction.

Have flashlights, battery powered lamps and extra batteries in case of a power outage. Candles and matches are a fire hazard.

Be prepared for the possibility of isolation in your home.

Make sure you have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off.

Have available some type of emergency heating equipment and fuel (a gas fireplace or wood burning stove or fireplace) so you can keep at least one room or your house warm enough to be livable. If your furnace is controlled by a thermostat and your electricity is cut off by a storm, you will need emergency heat.

Kerosene heaters are another option. However, check with your local fire department on the legality of using kerosene heaters in your community. With any combustion appliance, carbon monoxide fumes could be a danger. Additionally, heaters should be placed at least 36" inches from combustible materials.

If you have a fireplace, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood.

Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure your family knows how to use them and know fire prevention rules.

Winterize your home to extend the life of your fuel supply.

Insulate walls and attics.

Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.

Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic.

During a Winter Storm

Listen to the radio or watch television for updates on current weather conditions. With early warning you may avoid being caught in a storm or be better prepared to cope with it.

Overexertion can bring upon a heart attack - a major cause of death during and after winter storms. If shoveling snow isn't critical, don't do it. If you must shovel snow, don't overexert yourself.

Conserve fuel by keeping your house cooler than usual and be temporarily "closing off" heat to some rooms.

When kerosene heaters are used, maintain ventilation to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Also, always refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three (3) feet away from combustible objects

Dress for the season.

Wear layers of thin clothing instead of single layers of thick clothing. You'll be warmer and as the temperature changes, you can easily remove layers to remain comfortable.

Mittens are warmer than gloves.

Wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of the head.

Cover your mouth with scarves to protect lungs from directly inhaling the extreme cold air.

Driving Precautions

If you must travel, take public transportation whenever possible. If you must use a car, take winter driving seriously, travel by daylight and keep others informed of your schedule. Drive with extreme caution; never try to save time by driving fast or using back-road shortcuts.

Keep your car "winterized." Carry a "winter car kit" that includes a windshield scraper, flashlight, tow chain or rope, shovel, tire chains, a blanket, a bag of sand or salt, a fluorescent distress flag and an emergency flare. Keep extra mittens, hats and outerwear in the car.

If a blizzard traps you in your car:

Pull off of the highway; stay calm and remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you.

Turn on your emergency flashers and hang a cloth or distress flag from the radio aerial or window.

Do not set out to walk on foot unless you can see a building close to where you are and you are certain that you can seek shelter there. Be careful; distances can be distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk in deep snow.

If you run the engine of your car to keep warm, open a window slightly for ventilation. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Periodically clear away snow from the exhaust pipe and only run the engine of your vehicle periodically to conserve fuel and reduce the possibility of CO poisoning.

Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat as a blanket.

Never let everyone in the car sleep at one time. One person should look out for rescue crews.

Be careful not to use up battery power. Balance electrical energy needs the use of lights, heat and radio with supply.

At night, turn on the inside dome light, so work crews can spot you.

Wind Chill

Winter temperatures can be deceiving. Thermometers measure only the cold. Don't forget that the effects on your body are compounded by the wind. The combined effect of winter cold and the wind speed is called wind chill.

The dangerous effects of wind chill rise as the temperature drops and the wind increases. Heat is carried away faster from the skin, driving down the body temperature. This can lead to frostbite or hypothermia or extremely low body temperature.

Warning signs of hypothermia- Uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion.

Detection: take the person's body temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, immediately seek medical care.