

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Winter Storm Disaster Response (Snow, Freezing Rain, Sleet, Hail & High Winds)

Background

Winter storms can include high winds, freezing rain, sleet, heavy snowfall and extreme cold. Severe winter storms can cause blocked roads, downed power lines, power outages and transportation accidents.

It is good to familiarize yourself with the following terms:

- **Winter Storm *Watch*** means a winter storm is possible.
- **Winter Storm *Warning*** means a winter storm is occurring or will soon occur.
- **Blizzard *Warning*** means sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 miles per hour or greater and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected for a period of three hours or longer.
- **Frost/Freeze *Warning*** means below freezing temperatures are expected.
- **Freezing Rain** means that rain freezes when it hits the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads, walkways, trees, and power lines.
- **Sleet** means that rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground, causing moisture on roads to freeze and become slippery.

Before Winter Storms

- Listen to local Radio/TV weather forecasts and monitor social media to obtain updates and information.
- Sign up for text alerts from your local government.
- Sign up for weather alerts from NOAA/National Weather Service, including RSS feeds of your forecast and weather watches/warnings.
- Know the Emergency Plans for your Children's School
- Remember to use 9-1-1 only in life-threatening emergencies.
- Charge your digital camera or buy batteries for your camera if case you need to document storm damage.
- NEVER use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning device inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. These units should be located away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms in central locations on every level of your home and outside areas to provide early warning of accumulating carbon monoxide.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them and inspected every year.
- Allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing; running water at trickle helps prevent pipes from freezing.
- Remember to have enough provision for a minimum of three days.

Remember to add the following supplies to your disaster supplies kit:

- **Rock salt/ice melt/brine** to melt ice on walkways and driveways
- **Sand** to improve traction
- **Snow shovels** and other snow removal equipment.

Dress for the Weather

- **Wear several layers** of loose fitting, lightweight; warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
- **Wear mittens**, which are warmer than gloves.
- **Wear a hat.**
- **Cover your mouth** with a scarf to protect your lungs.

Prepare your home and your family

- **Prepare for possible isolation in your home** - Have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off. For example, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- **Winterize your home** to extend the life of your fuel supply by insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic.
- **Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter** for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.
- **Insulate pipes** with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- **Keep fire extinguishers on hand**, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose additional risks as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- **Learn how to shut off water valves** (in case a pipe bursts).
- **Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends, neighbors or employees.**
- **Make a family communication plan** in case you are not together with family when disaster strikes, know how to contact one another, how you will get back together, and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- **Hire a contractor to check the structural stability of the roof** to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow (or water).

Prepare your car

Remember to check or have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- **Antifreeze levels** - ensure they are sufficient to avoid freezing.
- **Battery and ignition system** - should be in top condition and battery terminals should be clean.
- **Brakes** - check for wear and fluid levels.
- **Heater and defroster** - ensure they work properly.
- **Maintain at least a half tank of gas** during the winter season.
- **Lights and flashing hazard lights** - check for serviceability.
- **Oil** - check for level and weight. Heavier oils congeal more at low temperatures and do not lubricate as well.
- **Thermostat** - ensure it works properly.
- **Windshield wiper equipment** - repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- **Install good winter tires** - make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require that to drive on their roads, vehicles must be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.

Prepare a winter emergency kit for your vehicle

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● shovel● windshield scraper and small broom● flashlight● battery powered radio● extra batteries● water● snack food● matches or lighter | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● extra hats, socks and mittens● first aid kit with pocket knife● necessary medications● blanket(s)● tow chain or rope● road salt and sand● booster cables● emergency flares |
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During Winter Storms

If you are indoors

- **Listen to your radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio** for weather reports and emergency information.
- **Eat regularly and drink ample fluids**, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- **Keep dry**-change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- **Conserve fuel, if necessary**, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- **If the pipes freeze**, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- **Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters** to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.

If you are outdoors

- **Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow.** Overexertion can bring on a heart attack, a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- **Cover your mouth.** Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors. Try not to speak unless it's necessary.
- **Keep dry.** Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- **Watch for signs of frostbite.** These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, seek medical help immediately.
- **Watch for signs of hypothermia.** These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion.
- **Bring pets inside** during winter weather, move livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

If you are driving

Drive only if it is absolutely necessary and consider the following:

- Travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule. Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive.
- Stay on main roads; avoid back road shortcuts.
- Drive with caution. When driving on ice, do not slam on the brakes or turn quickly.
- Should your car begin to skid, remember not to panic or slam on your brakes. Take your foot off the gas pedal and immediately steer in the direction of the skid.
- Increase following distance between your vehicle and others on the road.

After the Storm

Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, as are mental and physical well-being.

- Be aware of new safety issues created by the disaster. Watch for washed out roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring, and slippery floors.
- Inform local authorities about health and safety issues, including chemical spills, downed power lines, washed out roads, smoldering insulation, and dead animals.
- Go to a designated public shelter if your home loses power or heat during periods of extreme cold. Text **SHELTER** + your ZIP code to **43362** (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: **shelter 12345**).
- Before tackling strenuous tasks in cold temperatures, consider your physical condition, the weather factors and the nature of the task.
- Help people who require special assistance such as elderly people living alone, people with disabilities and children.