

Winter Weather Preparedness Tips

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is encouraging everyone to take preventive measures to ensure their safety and reduce the risk of winter storm damage to property.

Preparing Your Family

- Assemble a disaster supply kit. Store drinking water, canned/no-cook food, non-electric can opener, first aid kit, battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries where you can get them easily, even in the dark. Also include winter specific items such as rock salt, sand and other snow removal equipment.
- Prepare for the possibility that you will need to stay in your home for several days after a winter storm. Make sure that you have sufficient heating fuel as well as emergency heating equipment in case electricity is cut off.
- House fires pose an additional risk, as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions. Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them.
- Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends and neighbors or employees.
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid a build-up of toxic fumes and always refuel outside. Keep all heaters at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent. Wear a hat, mittens and sturdy, waterproof boots. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extremely cold air.

Preparing Your Car

- Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair. Winterize your car by checking your car battery, ignition system, thermostat, lights, flashers, exhaust, heater, brakes, defroster and tires. Ensure that your car has adequate antifreeze, windshield washer fluid and oil and check regularly throughout the season.
- Place a winter emergency kit in each car that includes a shovel, windshield scraper, flashlight, battery powered radio, extra batteries, water, snack food, extra hats and mittens, blanket, tow chain or rope, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and fluorescent distress flag.
- If traveling by car during a winter weather advisory or winter storm watch, do so in daylight, don't travel alone, keep others informed of your schedule and route, and stay on main roads. Avoid driving during a winter storm warning or blizzard warning.

Preparing Your Home

- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic, insulate walls and attics, and apply caulk and weather-stripping to doors and windows.
- 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.
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- Hire a contractor to check the structural ability of the roof to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow - or water, if drains on flat roofs do not work.
- Remove ice and snow from tree limbs, roof and other structures after the storm passes.

Winter Weather Terms

- Know the terms used by weather forecasters so that you clearly understand the risk to your family and your community, including:
 - **Winter weather advisory** - Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists;
 - **Winter storm watch** - Be alert, a storm is possible;
 - **Winter storm warning** - Take action, the storm is occurring or will soon occur in the area;
 - **Blizzard warning** - Snow and strong winds combined will produce blinding snow, near zero visibility, deep drifts, and life-threatening wind chill - seek refuge immediately;
 - **Frost/freeze warning** - Below freezing temperatures are expected.

Winter storms accounted for five national major disasters and eight emergency declarations in 2001 as well as five major disasters and one emergency declaration to date in 2002. The severe weather damaged homes and businesses from New York to Oregon.

Winter Driving

About 70 percent of winter deaths related to snow and ice occur in automobiles. Consider public transportation if you must travel. If you travel by car, travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule. Stay on main roads; avoid back-road shortcuts.

1. **Winterize your car.** This includes a battery check, antifreeze, wipers and windshield washer fluid, ignition system, thermostat, lights, flashing hazard lights, exhaust system, heater, brakes, defroster, oil level, and tires. Consider snow tires, snow tires with studs, or chains. Keep your car's gas tank full.
2. **Carry a disaster supplies** "winter car kit" in the trunk of your car. The kit should include:
 - Shovel
 - Windshield scraper
 - Battery-powered radio
 - Flashlight
 - Extra batteries
 - Water
 - Snack food
 - Mittens
 - Hat
 - Blanket
 - Tow chain or rope

- Tire chains
- Bag of road salt and sand
- Fluorescent distress flag
- Jumper/booster cables
- Road maps
- Emergency flares
- Cellular telephone or two-way radio, if available.

3. If a blizzard traps you in your car:

- Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio aerial or window.
- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful: distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater about ten minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a window slightly for ventilation. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning. Periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe.
- 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 for a blanket.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Drink fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs - the use of lights, heat and radio - with supply.
- At night, turn on the inside light so work crews or rescuers can see you.
- If stranded in a remote area, stomp large block letters in an open area spelling out HELP or SOS and line with rocks or tree limbs to attract the attention of rescue personnel who may be surveying the area by airplane.
- Once the blizzard passes, you may need to leave the car and proceed on foot.