

Safety Tips for Winter Weather

*From Amy Jeroy of Northern NH MRC, forwarded by Region I Liaison Jennifer Frenette:
NH Homeland Security and Emergency Management Snow Emergency Tips*

Please review the following tips and apply as needed this season!

Understand the **winter terminology** used by weather forecasters:

- Winter Storm Watch – Be alert: a storm is likely.
- Winter Storm Warning – Take action: the storm is in or entering 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.
- Winter Weather Advisory – Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists.
- Frost/Freeze Warning – Below freezing temperatures are expected and may cause damage to plants, crops or fruit trees. Trim dead tree branches and limbs close to your home. Ice, snow and wind can combine to snap limbs that can take down power lines or damage your home.

Check your **homeowner's insurance** policy to ensure adequate coverage. Have sufficient **heating fuel**; regular sources may be cut off. Have the option of emergency heating equipment and fuel (a gas fireplace, wood burning stove or fireplace) so you can keep at least one room livable. Be sure the room is well ventilated.

Ensure that your **Carbon Monoxide** (CO) detectors are working correctly and have fresh batteries. Check your outside fuel exhaust vents to make sure they are not obstructed by snow or ice. Never use equipment intended for outside use indoors as a heat source or cooking device.

To keep **pipes** from freezing, wrap them in insulation or layers of newspapers, covering the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture. Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing.

Know how to safely **shut off** gas, electric power and water valves.

If your **water supply** could be affected by a power outage (a well-water pump system), be prepared to fill your bathtub and spare containers with water. Water in the bathtub should be used for sanitation purposes only, not as drinking water. Pouring a pail of water from the tub directly into the bowl can flush a toilet.

If **pipes freeze**, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they are most exposed to the cold. A hand-held hair dryer, used with caution, also works well. If electric power is lost, do not open the refrigerator or freezer door. Food can stay cold in a full refrigerator for up to 24 hours, and in a well-packed freezer for 48 hours (24 hours if it is half-packed). If you have **medication** that requires refrigeration, check with your pharmacist for guidance on proper storage during an extended outage.

Review the process for manually operating an **electric garage door**.

Ensure your **Winter Emergency Supply Kit** is stocked with supplies to enable you to survive on your own for at least three to five days. There should be some non-perishable food, bottled water, flashlights and extra batteries, along with a portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio, in case of power outages or other emergencies caused by a winter storm.

Additional items that should be included in your Winter Emergency Supply Kit are a freshly stocked first-aid kit, essential prescription medicines, non-perishable foods (those that require no refrigeration such as canned goods, dried fruits and nuts), a manual can opener, water (one gallon per person, per day), baby-care items, extra blankets, sleeping bags and a fire extinguisher. Ensure that your **Winter Emergency Car Kit** is well stocked to keep you and your vehicle safe.

Be a **Good Neighbor**. Check with elderly or disabled relatives and neighbors to ensure they have made adequate preparations.

Preparedness: What to do during a winter storm or extreme cold

Add the following supplies to your disaster supplies kit:

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

Prepare your home and family

- **Prepare for possible isolation in your home** by having 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.
- **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 an additional risk, 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.**

Prepare your car

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

- **Antifreeze levels** – Ensure that 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.
- **Exhaust system** – Check for leaks and crimped pipes, and repair or replace as necessary. *Carbon monoxide is deadly and usually gives no warning.*
- **Fuel and air filters** – Replace and keep water out of the system, by using additives and maintaining a full tank of gas.
- **Heater and defroster** – Ensure that they work properly.
- **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 that it works properly.
- **Windshield wiper equipment** – Repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- **Install good winter tires** and 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.
- **Maintain at least a half tank of gas**, if not a full tank of gas, during the winter season. You do not want to become stranded if stuck in extreme traffic jams.

Place a winter emergency kit in each car that includes:

- Windshield scraper and small broom
- Shovel
- Flashlight
- Battery-powered radio
- Extra batteries
- Water
- Snack food
- Matches
- Extra hats, socks and mittens
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- Blanket(s)
- Tow chain or rope
- Road salt and sand
- Booster (jumper) cables
- Emergency flares
- Fluorescent distress flag

Dress for the Weather

- **Wear several layers** of loose fitting, light weight, and 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.

Best Practices During a Winter Storm

- **Listen to your radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio** for weather reports and emergency information. Or visit NOAA online at <http://www.noaa.gov>
- **Eat regularly and drink ample fluids**, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- **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.

Best Practices If You Are Outdoors

- **Assume all power lines that are down are live!** Do not touch or attempt to move them. Do not walk or drive through water that has a downed power line touching it.
- **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 absolutely 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, get medical help immediately.
- **Watch for signs of hypothermia.** These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion.

If symptoms of hypothermia are detected:

- Get the victim to a warm location.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Put the person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

- Warm the center of the body first.
- Give warm, non-alcoholic or non-caffeinated beverages if the victim is conscious.
- Get medical help as soon as possible.

Best Practices If You Are Driving

Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive, consider the following:

- Travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule.
- Stay on main roads; avoid back road shortcuts.

If you become trapped in a car:

- **Pull off the highway.** Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna 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 10 minutes each hour to keep warm.** When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. *This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide 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 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.
- **Turn on the inside light at night** 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.
- **Leave the car and proceed on foot, if necessary,** once the blizzard passes.

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