



FEMA

Are You Ready?

A Preparedness Guide for Winter Storms



A Guide to Winter Storm Preparedness

The winter months bring snow and ice storms, power outages and hazardous driving conditions. However, you can prepare for a disaster by taking a few steps to deal with the challenges of winter weather.

- Compile an emergency survival kit that includes a three-day supply of food and water, flashlights, a first-aid kit, a battery-operated radio, extra batteries and medications.
- Create a family communications plan. Make sure everyone agrees on a local meeting place if you cannot return home. Designate an out-of-town contact in the event you become separated.
- Before, during and after a storm, get current information through the news media and from local emergency management officials.

This publication features winter storm survival tips. More detailed information is available at www.fema.gov.

Before Severe Weather Arrives

- Store drinking water, first-aid kit, canned/no-cook food, non-electric can opener, radio, flashlight and extra batteries where you can get them easily, even in the dark.
- Keep vehicles fueled and in good repair, with a winter emergency kit in each.
- Monitor your NOAA Weather Radio or local radio and/or TV station for information and emergency instructions.
- Know how to turn off gas, electric power and water before evacuating.
- Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends, neighbors or employees.
- Keep plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, sandbags and hand tools accessible.
- Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Install

storm shutters, doors and windows; clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks; and 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.

During a Winter Storm

- Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your house cooler than normal. Temporarily shut off heat to less-used rooms.
- If using kerosene heaters, maintain ventilation to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Keep heaters at least three feet from flammable objects. Refuel kerosene heaters outside.
- Avoid travel if possible. If you must travel, do so during daylight. Do not travel alone. Stay on main roads, keep others informed of your schedule and follow routes designated by local officials.
- If you go outside for any reason, dress for expected conditions. For cold weather, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Wear a hat. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extremely cold air. Wear sturdy, water-proof boots in snow or flooding conditions.

If a Blizzard Traps You in Your Car

- Pull off the road, set hazard lights to flashing and hang a distress flag from the radio aerial or window. Remain in your vehicle.
- Conserve fuel, but run the engine and heater about ten minutes each hour to keep warm, cracking a downwind window slightly to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Exercise to maintain body heat, but

don't overexert. Huddle with other passengers and use your coat for a blanket.

- In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, floor mats, newspapers or extra clothing for covering – anything to provide additional insulation and warmth.
- Turn on the inside dome light so rescue teams can see you at night, but be careful not to run the battery down. In remote areas, spread a large cloth over the snow to attract the attention of rescue planes. Stay in your vehicle. Weather conditions could change suddenly.

After the Storm

- Report downed power lines and broken gas lines immediately.
- After blizzards, heavy snows or extreme cold, check to see that no physical damage has occurred and that water pipes are functioning. Wait for streets and roads to be opened before you attempt to drive anywhere.
- Check on neighbors, especially any who might need help. Beware of overexertion and exhaustion. Shoveling snow in extreme cold causes many heart attacks. Set your priorities and pace yourself after any disaster that leaves you with a mess to clean up. The natural tendency is to do too much too soon.

Returning to Your Home

- Do not turn electricity back on if you smell gas or if the electric system has been flooded.
- Wear sturdy work boots and gloves.
- Do not handle electric equipment in wet areas.
- Use flashlights, not lanterns, candles or matches, to check buildings containing natural gas, propane or gasline.
- Follow directions from local officials regarding the safety of drinking water.
- Clean and disinfect everything that was touched by floodwaters and throw out contaminated food items.

Beware of Winter Dangers

In addition to snow and ice, winter weather can bring other dangers, including fires, carbon monoxide poisoning and frostbite. Here are some safety tips to protect your family from these hazards.

Fire

Each year, poorly maintained furnaces and the improper use of heating, cooking and lighting equipment causes thousands of fires in the United States. To avoid risk of fire:

- Install smoke detectors on each floor of your home and test them monthly.
- Equip your home with Type ABC fire extinguishers.
- Have your furnace cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified technician.
- Never use a range or oven to heat your home. They can cause burns and are a source of potentially toxic fumes.

If you use an electric space heater, read and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Do not overload circuits, and be sure to keep the heater away from curtains, drapes and other flammable material.

Frostbite / hypothermia

- Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure. Its symptoms are a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes. Hypothermia is less severe. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness or exhaustion.

If you suspect someone has these conditions, begin warming the victim slowly and get immediate medical assistance.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide, a product of combustion, is one of the most common causes of accidental poisoning in the United States. A gas that has no color, odor or taste, carbon monoxide bonds with hemoglobin in the blood, displacing oxygen. It is produced by common home appliances, such as gas or oil furnaces, clothes dryers, ranges, space heaters and wood stoves.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Make sure all stoves, fireplaces, furnaces and space heaters are properly installed, vented and maintained. (Electric heaters do not produce carbon monoxide).
- Check flues, chimneys and vents often to make sure they are clear of snow, ice and other debris.
- Repair rusted or pitted flue pipes leading from the furnace and/or water heater to the chimney.
- Do not block the furnace air intake.
- Do not operate a barbecue grill indoors or in an enclosed porch or garage, even with the door open.
- Do not use a gas range or oven for home heating.
- Do not adjust pilot lights yourself.
- Purchase a carbon monoxide detector, with alarms that are triggered when the amount of carbon monoxide in the air approaches hazardous levels.

