

# FEMA Factsheet: Winter Storms

## Winter Driving Tips

A major winter storm can be lethal. Preparing for cold weather conditions and responding to them effectively can reduce the dangers caused by winter storms.

### **BEFORE**

Be familiar with winter storm warning messages.

Service snow removal equipment and have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways and kitty litter to generate temporary traction.

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

Winterize your home.

- , Insulate walls and attic.
- , Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- , Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.

Have safe emergency heating equipment available.

- , Fireplace with ample supply of wood
- , Small, well-vented, wood, coal, or camp stove with fuel
- , Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters (See Kerosene Heaters.)

Install and check smoke detectors.

Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter for more information on winter storms.

Keep pipes from freezing.

- , Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers.
- , Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture.
- , Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing.
- , Know how to shut off water valves.

Have disaster supplies on hand, in case the power goes out.

- , Flashlight and extra batteries
- , Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries.
- , First aid kit
- , One-week supply of food (include items that do not require refrigeration or cooking in case the power is shut off)
- , Nonelectric can opener
- , One-week supply of essential prescription medications.
- , Extra blankets and sleeping bags
- , Fire extinguisher (A-B-C type)

Develop an emergency communication plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a winter storm (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a severe winter storm.

Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, or fire department, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.

### Kerosene Heaters

Check with your local fire department on the legality of using kerosene heaters in your community. Use only the correct fuel for your unit and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Refuel outdoors only, and only when cool. Keep your kerosene heater at least 3 feet away from furniture and other flammable objects.

## **DURING**

### **IF INDOORS**

Stay indoors and dress warmly.

Conserve fuel.

Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night. Close off unused 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).

Listen to the radio or television to get the latest information.

### **IF OUTDOORS**

Dress warmly.

Wear loose-fitting, layered, light-weight clothing. Layers can be removed to prevent perspiration and chill. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves because fingers generate warmth when they touch each other.

Stretch before you go out.

If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. Also take frequent breaks.

Cover your mouth.

Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors. Try not to speak unless absolutely necessary.

Avoid overexertion.

Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.

Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.

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.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

### **Wind Chill**

"Wind chill" is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the effects of temperature and wind speed are combined. On November 1, 2001, the National Weather Service (NWS) implemented a replacement Wind Chill Temperature (WCT) index for the 2001/2002 winter season. The reason for the change was to improve upon the current WCT Index which was based on the 1945 Siple and Passel Index. For more on the new index, please visit the NWS web site.

#### **Winter Storm Watches and Warnings**

A winter storm watch indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area. A winter storm warning indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.

A blizzard warning means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

#### **Frostbite and Hypothermia**

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.

Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance. Warm the person's trunk first. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it (like coffee or tea) or alcohol. Caffeine, a stimulant, can cause the heart to beat faster and hasten the effects the cold has on the body. Alcohol, a depressant, can slow the heart and also hasten the ill effects of cold body temperatures.

### **MITIGATION**

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now such as purchasing a flood insurance policy and installing storm windows will help reduce the impact of winter storms in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.

[Winter Storms Update Center](#)