

Personal Responsibility in Winter Weather

We all know that it is up to us to make the final decision as to the safety steps we are going to follow to save our life or the life of those around us. Time and time again we see that people are not making the wisest decisions. We have seen people run and grab the camcorder to get that last shot of a tornado when it is bearing down on them. We have seen people remain at home during a mandatory hurricane evacuation. One could easily argue that these are not the smartest decisions a person can make. The saddest part to these scenarios is that we generally end up laughing at them when we would probably do the same thing if put in their shoes.

Winter weather is no different when assessing your personal responsibility and risk. Do you **really** need to be out on the road in a freezing rain situation when vehicles are sliding uncontrollably? Do you need to be on the road with one foot of snow on the ground to get to the movies or to grab a loaf of bread? I would venture a guess that you do not. Why not plan for the upcoming weather event by preparing ahead of time? The majority of winter weather events come with lead times of over 12 hours. This gives you plenty of time to head to the store to buy the necessities that you may need for a couple of days if conditions warrant minimal travel. How about delaying your travel to a time where you avoid peak traffic. It is usually better to travel later in the morning after road crews have had an opportunity to clear the roads.

For this upcoming winter weather season, plan ahead and make a conscientious decision to keep you and your family safe by following some of the following winter weather safety rules.

BEFORE the storm

Be familiar with winter storm warning messages.

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
- * Non-electric 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.

DURING the storm

IF INDOORS

Stay indoors and dress warmly.

Conserve fuel.

Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night.

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. You will also need to take frequent breaks and cover your mouth while working. This will protect your lungs from extremely cold air. 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.

**Winter Weather Awareness Day
November 19, 2003**