Winter Storms

Winter storms can range from a moderate snow over a few hours to a blizzard with blinding, wind-driven snow that lasts for several days. Some winter storms are large enough to affect several states, while others affect only a single community. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures and sometimes by strong winds, icing, sleet, and freezing rain.

Regardless of the severity of a winter storm, you should be prepared in order to remain safe during these events.

Prepare for a Winter Storm

- Winterize your vehicle and keep the gas tank full. A full tank will keep the fuel line from freezing.
- Insulate your home by installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic from the inside to keep cold air out.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected every year.
- If you go away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

Assemble an Emergency Kit

- water (at least a 3-day supply; 1 gallon per person per day)
- food (at least a 3-day supply of nonperishable, easy-to-prepare food)
- flashlight
- battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA weather radio, if possible)
- extra batteries
- first aid kit
- medications (7-day supply) and medical items (hearing aids with extra batteries, glasses, contact lenses, syringes, etc.)
- multipurpose tool
- sanitation and personal hygiene items
- copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- cell phone with charger
- family and emergency contact information
- extra cash
- baby supplies
- pet supplies
- tools/supplies for securing your home
- sand, rock salt, or nonclumping kitty litter to make walkways and steps less slippery
- warm coats, gloves or mittens, hats, boots, extra blankets, and warm clothing for all household members
Stay Safe During a Winter Storm

- Listen to a NOAA weather radio or other local news channels for critical information on snow storms and blizzards from the National Weather Service (NWS).
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas and make sure that their access to food and water is not blocked by snow drifts, ice, or other obstacles.
- Running water, even at a trickle, helps prevent pipes from freezing.
- Alternate heating methods, such as fireplaces or wood- or coal-burning stoves
- All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside and kept clear.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals out of the reach of children.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature during the day and at night. By temporarily suspending the use of lower nighttime temperatures, you may incur a higher heating bill, but you can prevent a much more costly repair job if pipes freeze and burst.
- Go to a designated public shelter if your home loses power or heat during periods of extreme cold.
- Avoid driving when conditions include sleet, freezing rain or drizzle, snow, or dense fog. Keep an emergency supply kit in your vehicle in case travel is necessary.
- Before tackling strenuous tasks in cold temperatures, consider your physical condition, the weather factors, and the nature of the task.
- Protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in several layers. Stay indoors, if possible.
- Help people who require special assistance such as elderly people living alone, people with disabilities, and children.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide

- Never use a generator, grill, camp stove, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawl space, or any partially enclosed area. Locate unit away from doors, windows, and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.
- The primary hazards to avoid when using alternate sources for electricity, heating, or cooking are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock, and fire.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms in central locations on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas to provide early warning of accumulating carbon monoxide.
- If the carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh-air location outdoors or by an open window or door.
- Call for help from the fresh-air location and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you.

Prepare for Cold-Related Emergencies

Frostbite and hypothermia are two dangerous and potentially life-threatening emergencies. Learn how to care for these emergencies by taking a first aid class.

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