

# HELPFUL TIPS TO PREPARE FOR THE WINTER



Are you prepared for winter storms and extreme cold? If you're like most of us, the answer is no, you're not as prepared as you would like to be. These events can strike suddenly, at any time during the harsh New England winters. To prepare for a winter storm you should remember the following: Before, During, and After.

## **Before: Winter Storms & Extreme Cold**

- Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your emergency kit:
  - Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways. Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for a complete list of recommended products.
  - Sand to improve traction.
  - Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
  - Sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
  - Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
  - Make a Family Communications Plan.
  - Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
  - Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Be alert to changing weather conditions.
  - Minimize travel. If travel is necessary, keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.

- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

## Winterize Your Vehicle

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

- **Antifreeze levels** - ensure 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. A full tank will keep the fuel line from freezing.
- **Heater and defroster** - ensure 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 it works properly.
- **Windshield wiper equipment** - repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- **Install good winter tires** - 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.

**Update the emergency kits in your vehicles with:**

- a shovel
- windshield scraper and small broom
- 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 cables
- emergency flares
- fluorescent distress flag

## **Winterize Your Home**

- Winterize your home to extend the life of your fuel supply by insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic.
- Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected every year.
- Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing. Running water, even at a trickle, helps prevent pipes from freezing.
- All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside and kept clear.
- 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).
- Insulate your home by installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic from the inside to keep cold air out.
- Hire a contractor to 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: Winter Storms & Extreme Cold**

- Stay inside! Sidewalks can be very slippery and you can hurt yourself if you fall.
- If you are outside helping to shovel snow, make sure you wear a hat. It helps keep you from losing body heat.

- Mittens are warmer than gloves.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from the cold air.
- Put on dry clothes as soon as you come inside.
- If you can't feel your fingers, toes, ears or nose, or they appear pale white, tell a grown-up.

Tell a grown-up immediately if you can't stop shivering, have trouble remembering things, feel tired or talk funny. You may have hypothermia which can be very dangerous.

## After Winter Storms & Extreme Cold

Continue to wear layers, a hat, scarf, and mittens or gloves. These will help to keep you warm and protect you from frostbite.

## Know the Terms

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify a winter storm hazard:

- **Freezing Rain** - Rain that freezes when it hits the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads, walkways, trees and power lines.
- **Sleet** - Rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes moisture on roads to freeze and become slippery.
- **Winter Weather Advisory** - Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. When caution is used, these situations should not be life threatening.
- **Winter Storm Watch** - A winter storm is possible in your area. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, or television for more information.
- **Winter Storm Warning** - A winter storm is occurring or will soon occur in your area.
- **Blizzard Warning** - Sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 miles per hour or greater and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.
- **Frost/Freeze Warning** - Below freezing temperatures are expected.

## Carbon Monoxide

**Caution: Carbon Monoxide Kills!**

- Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace 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.

For helpful tips to prepare for a storm, please visit:

- **QCC Health and Wellness website** : <http://www.qcc.edu/health-wellness>
- **Build a Disaster Kit**: <http://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>
- **Emergency Preparedness and You**: <http://www.ready.gov/kids/know-the-facts/winter-storms-extreme-cold>
- **FEMA's website**: <http://m.fema.gov/before-winter-storms-extreme-cold> and
- **MEMA's website**: <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/agencies/mema/>