

Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

Heavy snowfall and extreme cold can immobilize an entire region. Even areas that normally experience mild winters, like New Mexico, can be hit with a major snowstorm or extreme cold.

Know Your Winter Storm and Extreme Cold Terms

Freezing Rain

Rain that freezes when it hits the ground creates 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 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.

Prepare Your Home and Family for Winter Storms

Winterize your home, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock, or equipment. Insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic will extend the life of your fuel supply.

Clear rain gutters, repair roof leaks, and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.

Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.

Prepare for possible isolation in your home by having sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off. For example, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.

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).

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.



**Heavy
Snowfall**



Guidelines During a Winter Storm

If You are outdoors

Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.

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

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.

Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.

Watch for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion.

If You MUST use your car

Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. Travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule. Stay on main roads; avoid back road shortcuts.

If a blizzard traps you in the car

Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window. Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket. Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews. Drink fluids to avoid dehydration. Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs - the use of lights, heat, and radio - with supply. Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you. ■

Winter Emergency Kit



TIPS

Prepare Your Car for Winter Storms

Check your antifreeze levels, battery and ignition system, brakes, exhaust system, fuel and air filters, heater and defroster, lights and flashing hazard lights, oil, thermostat, and windshield wiper equipment. Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.

Have a winter emergency kit 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, a blanket, tow chain or rope, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and a fluorescent distress flag in your car.