

Winter Weather Preparedness Tips

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is encouraging everyone to take preventive measures to ensure their safety and reduce the risk of winter storm damage to property.

Preparing Your Family

- ☒ Assemble a disaster supply kit. Store drinking water, canned/no-cook food, non-electric can opener, first aid kit, battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries where you can get them easily, even in the dark. Also include winter specific items such as rock salt, sand and other snow removal equipment.
- ☒ Keep important documents - including insurance policies, birth certificates and passports - in an easily accessible waterproof box.
- ☒ Prepare for the possibility that you will need to stay in your home for several days after a winter storm. Make sure that you have sufficient heating fuel as well as emergency heating equipment in case electricity is cut off. *(This is obviously more common back east and where heavy snow hits.)*
- ☒ House fires pose an additional risk, as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions. Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them.
- ☒ Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends and neighbors or employees.
- ☒ Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid a build-up of toxic fumes and always refuel outside. Keep all heaters at least three feet from flammable objects.
- ☒ Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent. Wear a hat, mittens and sturdy, waterproof boots. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extremely cold air.

Preparing Your Car

- ☒ Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair. Winterize your car by checking your car battery, ignition system, thermostat, lights, flashers, exhaust, heater, brakes, defroster and tires. Ensure that your car has adequate antifreeze, windshield washer fluid and oil and check regularly throughout the season.
- ☒ Place a winter emergency kit in each car that includes a shovel, windshield scraper, flashlight, battery powered radio, extra batteries, water, snack food, extra hats and mittens, blanket, tow chain or rope, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and fluorescent distress flag.

- ☒ If traveling by car during a winter weather advisory or winter storm watch, do so in daylight, don't travel alone, keep others informed of your schedule and route, and stay on main roads. Avoid driving during a winter storm warning or blizzard warning.

Preparing Your Home

- ☒ Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic, insulate walls and attics, and apply caulk and weather-stripping to doors and windows.
- ☒ 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.
- ☒ Caulk cracks around windows and doors to prevent water from seeping inside. Check old caulk every year for chips and cracks, which indicates the caulk has dried out and needs replacement.
- ☒ Protect basement walls by sealing them with a cement or concrete sealer.
- ☒ Check trees in your yard and remove any dead branches, which could fall during heavy rain and cause damage.
- ☒ Remove leaves, branches and debris from gutters and drains. Otherwise, water could overflow and rot the woodwork around the roof area.
- ☒ Plug sewer traps with check valves - special valves that direct water in one direction only - thereby preventing it from backing up into your home. You can purchase these at a hardware store, or improvise by using large corks or stoppers to plug sinks and tubs in an emergency.
- ☒ Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- ☒ Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- ☒ Know how to turn your electricity off in the event your house gets flooded. Make sure not to turn it back on until everything has dried out.
- ☒ Lower the water level in your swimming pool, so it is less likely to overflow during heavy rain. The chlorinated pool water can be harmful to your grass.
- ☒ Turn off automated sprinkler systems when rain is expected.
- ☒ Bring outdoor belongings, such as patio furniture, indoors.
- ☒ Stock up on sand and sandbags to fill in low areas around your home.

- ☒ Ask your local planning and zoning office whether your property is above or below the flood level, and find out if your area has a history of flooding.
- ☒ 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.

Winter Weather Terms

Know the terms used by weather forecasters so that you clearly understand the risk to your family and your community, including:

- Winter weather advisory - Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists;
- Winter storm watch - Be alert, a storm is possible;
- Winter storm warning - Take action, the storm is occurring or will soon occur in the area;
- Blizzard warning - Snow and strong winds combined will produce blinding snow, near zero visibility, deep drifts, and life-threatening wind chill - seek refuge immediately;
- Frost/freeze warning - Below freezing temperatures are expected.

Winter storms accounted for five national major disasters and eight emergency declarations in 2001 as well as five major disasters and one emergency declaration to date in 2002. The severe weather damaged homes and businesses from New York to Oregon.