

# Winter Preparedness Safety Tips

Timely preparation, including structural and non-structural mitigation measures to avoid the impacts of severe winter weather, can avert heavy personal, business and government expenditures. Experts agree that the following measures can be effective in dealing with the challenges of severe winter weather:

## BEFORE SEVERE WEATHER ARRIVES

- Store drinking water, first aid kit, canned/no-cook food, non-electric can opener, radio, flashlight and extra batteries where you can get them easily, even in the dark.
- Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair, with a winter emergency kit in each.
- Get a NOAA Weather Radio to monitor severe weather.
- Know how the public is warned (siren, radio, TV, etc.) and the warning terms for each kind of disaster in your community; e.g.:
  - "winter storm watch" --- Be alert, a storm is likely
  - "winter storm warning" --- Take action, the storm is in or entering 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!
  - "winter weather advisory" --- Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists
  - "frost/freeze warning" --- Below freezing temperatures are expected and may cause damage to plants, crops, or fruit trees
  - "flash flood or flood watch" --- Be alert to signs of flash flooding and be ready to evacuate on a moment's notice
  - "flash flood warning" --- A flash flood is imminent--act quickly to save yourself because you may have only seconds
  - "flood warning" --- Flooding has been reported or is imminent--take necessary precautions at once
- Know safe routes from home, work and school to high ground.
- Know how to contact other household members through a common out-of-state contact in the event you and have to evacuate and become separated.
- Know how to turn off gas, electric power and water before evacuating.

- Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends, neighbors or employees.
- Keep plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, sandbags and hand tools on hand and accessible.
- Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Install storm shutters, doors and windows; clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks; and 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.
- If you think you might want to volunteer in case of a disaster, now is the time to let voluntary organizations or the emergency services office know--beforehand.

#### DURING ANY STORM OR EMERGENCY

- Monitor your NOAA Weather Radio or keep a local radio and/or TV station on for information and emergency instructions.
- Have your emergency survival kit ready to go if told to evacuate.
- If you go outside for any reason, dress for the season and expected conditions: For cold weather, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Wear a hat. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extremely cold air. Wear sturdy, waterproof boots in snow or flooding conditions.
- If advised to evacuate, tell others where you are going, turn off utilities if told to, then leave immediately, following routes designated by local officials.

#### DURING A FLOOD

- Avoid areas subject to sudden flooding.
- Do not try to walk across running water more than 6 inches deep; even 6 inches of rapidly running water can sweep you off your feet.
- Do not drive into flooded areas. If your car stalls, abandon it immediately--if you can--and seek higher ground.

#### DURING A WINTER STORM

- Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your house cooler than normal. Temporarily shut off heat to less-used rooms.

- If using kerosene heaters, maintain ventilation to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Keep heaters at least three feet from flammable objects. Refuel kerosene heaters outside.
- Avoid travel if possible. If you must travel, do so during daylight. Don't travel alone. Stay on main roads, and keep others informed of your schedule.

#### IF A BLIZZARD TRAPS YOU IN YOUR CAR

- Pull off the road, set hazard lights to flashing, and hang a distress flag from the radio aerial or window. Remain in your vehicle; rescuers are most likely to find you there.
- Conserve fuel, but run the engine and heater about ten minutes each hour to keep warm, cracking a downwind window slightly to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Exercise to maintain body heat but don't overexert. Huddle with other passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- In extreme cold use road maps, seat covers, floor mats, newspapers or extra clothing for covering--anything to provide additional insulation and warmth.
- Turn on the inside dome light so rescue teams can see you at night, but be careful not to run the battery down. In remote areas, spread a large cloth over the snow to attract the attention of rescue planes.
- Do not set out on foot unless you see a building close by where you know you can take shelter.
- Once the blizzard is over, you may need to leave the car and proceed on foot. Follow the road if possible. If you need to walk across open country, use distant points as landmarks to help maintain your sense of direction.

#### AFTER THE STORM

- Report downed power lines and broken gas lines immediately.
- After blizzards, heavy snows or extreme cold, check to see that no physical damage has occurred and that water pipes are functioning. If there are no other problems, wait for streets and roads to be opened before you attempt to drive anywhere.
- Check on neighbors, especially any who might need help.
- Beware of overexertion and exhaustion. Shoveling snow in extreme cold causes many heart attacks. Set your priorities and pace yourself after any disaster that leaves you with a mess to clean up. The natural tendency is to do too much too soon.