

Winter Storm Preparedness



By Mary Ellen Welch, UConn Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator

During the winter, see what conditions are forecast in your area for the upcoming week. If a winter storm is predicted, you want to be **SAFE** and **WARM**. Take actions to prepare in advance. Winter weather may include extreme cold, snow, blizzards, ice, freezing rain, high winds, flooding or thunder and lightning. Pay attention to the wind chill on weather forecasts, it makes you feel colder than the actual temperature.

You need to consider:

- Track the weather's arrival
- Use emergency alert systems
- Get your home ready for winter
- How to be safe and where to stay
- Keeping your pet(s) safe and warm
- How to stay warm (even during a power outage)
- Travel precautions

Track the Winter Weather's Arrival

A winter storm **advisory** is issued when strong weather is foretasted, and might cause inconvenience.

A winter storm **watch** is issued when there is a possibility for severe and hazardous weather that may occur within one to three days.

A winter storm **warning** is issued for a significant winter weather event. Travel will be difficult or impossible. Pay attention to wind chill on weather forecasts, it makes it feel like the temperature is lower than it actually is, so you will feel colder.

Sign up for Emergency Alerts, which tell you when severe weather is expected in your area. Alerts can be received on cell phones and land line phones. Wireless alerts come through your mobile carrier. Or Smartphone users can download the FEMA weather app, (free in the U.S.) so that you will be alerted on your phone of severe weather. The National Weather Service provides alerts for all hazards through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio Receiver (NWR). TV, radio, social media, the internet, government officials, family, friends and neighbors are good sources of weather information. There are radio receivers that are designed to work with external notification devices for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Voice activated talking telephones can also assist people with hearing impairments. Captioned telephones have large screens for people with visual impairments. Seniors should sign up for alerts in their town through local senior centers or town hall. Evacuate (leave) if directed by a government official.

Get Your Home Ready for Winter

Keep your home in good structural condition year-round so the gutters are clean, your roof doesn't leak, and the roof can support heavy snow and ice. Impact resistant roof coverings are available for hail. Repair anything that is broken. Insulation will keep you somewhat warmer during a power outage. Insulate your home and pipes, and use weather stripping around your doors and window sills. Use storm windows, apply caulk, and check window locks. In extreme cold you may wish to turn the faucet on and off occasionally to try to prevent the pipes from freezing. However, learn how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts. Hire a contractor/speak to the maintenance department if repairs are needed. Have a professional cut down trees that are weak or dying. Never go outside when you hear a tree cracking or falling – due to the risk of other trees or electrical wires falling on you!

How to Be Safe - Where Should you Stay?

Safety is most important during winter storms. Plan ahead to know where you will be staying. Will you be at home, at a shelter, or at a friend or family member's home? Make a communication plan - a written list of key telephone numbers, email addresses, and a location to meet or reconnect. Also designate an out of town contact who will keep track of where household members will be. Discuss this with people close to you – friends, family, neighbors or senior citizen center staff members. Try to select a location with heat, food, and water. People with disabilities or medical issues may need to go to a shelter or to a hospital. In advance of the storm, call your town, local fire department or Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). They may be able to provide transportation assistance to a shelter or a local medical facility.

Make an emergency kit for at least three days or more for each household member and pet with items you use daily. Food and water (one gallon per person per day), flashlights, LED lights and battery operated candles are recommended if the lights go out. Try to prevent tripping in the dark. Do not use flammable candles as these could cause a fire if left unattended. Keep fire extinguishers handy and stock up on new batteries before winter starts. Keep an indoor and an outdoor thermometer to monitor temperatures. This is especially important for older adults.

Wood burning stoves and fireplaces are good alternate sources of heat. Have a professional clean and inspect stoves/fireplaces/chimneys/flues every year. Have battery operated smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home and in every bedroom. Generators should only be used outdoors, at least 20' from a building/home. Never use nor bring gasoline or diesel generators, charcoal, or kerosene fueled appliances inside a home, garage, crawl space or basement. When fuel burning appliances malfunction, they can emit carbon monoxide – a colorless, odorless, tasteless, and dangerous gas. Cooking, heating and power equipment designed for outdoor use, should never be used indoors. Some carbon monoxide detectors plug in to a socket and require no professional installation. If these alarms sound, leave your home immediately and call 9-1-1 from outside.



Wood Burning Stove



Battery Operated Candles

No Power? Go to a Shelter or Safe Location

If you believe there could be power outages and you do not have access to heat or a generator, consider going to a shelter in your town. Contact your town to find the location(s). Bring your emergency kit and ask what else to bring and when to arrive. A kit may include your cell phone, electronics, medicine, food, water, toiletries, and a towel if they have shower facilities, clothing, a pillow and blanket, sleeping bag, first aid kit and games/reading materials. Keep a written record of key telephone numbers/email addresses of people you know. Texting is a good way to keep in touch.

Keep Pets Warm Inside

Keep your pet(s) safe and warm inside during winter storms. Ask if your town has a pet shelter for your pet to stay at temporarily during a winter storm. If so, ask what is required and pack a kit for your pet with all the essentials including vaccination papers and medicines. If your town does not have a pet shelter, talk to your pet's veterinarian and make a plan in advance. A neighbor, friend or relative may be able to provide temporary care for your pet(s).

Stay Warm

Cold related illnesses such as hypothermia are dangerous. People exposed to extreme and prolonged cold temperatures can develop this illness. The body loses heat faster than it can make heat. Adults can shiver, become exhausted, confused, and drowsy or have slurred speech. Infants turn bright red, have skin that is cold to the touch, and have less energy. Take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°F, seek medical care immediately. Keep children inside during winter storms. Children should always be supervised by an adult when outside after a storm has passed.

Multiple layers of clothing keep you warmer than a single layer. Have pants, jackets, boots, mittens, gloves, face, hand and neck warmers available. Change into dry clothing if it becomes wet. Eat nutritious high energy foods and foods with protein. Do not eat food that has spoiled during a power outage.

Traveling in Winter

For those who must go out or to work during a storm, let a close friend/family member know what time you are leaving, and the time you plan to arrive at work/home. Give yourself extra travel time. Minimize travel to prevent motor vehicle and pedestrian accidents.

If you take public transportation, check for updates, changes to the schedule, or possible closings of the system. Dress warm if taking public transportation. If you will be walking when it is dark, wear reflective gear on the front and back of your body.

When driving, keep your vehicle repaired, fueled up, and remove snow/ice before getting on the road. Maintain a car kit with a metal shovel, ice scraper/snow broom, a fully charged cell phone with a portable charger, flares, a whistle, a first aid kit, blankets, boots, non-perishable snacks and water.

Stick to routes you are familiar with, that are well traveled, where help is available if needed. If the state closes down highways, do not use them. Do not allow snow to build up nor block the tailpipe of your vehicle, if you get stuck. This could cause carbon monoxide poisoning inside of your car whenever you turn on the engine. This could pose a threat to your health and life. If your vehicle is stuck and no one is around to help, try to conserve heat and don't go too far away from your vehicle.



After the Storm

Do not go outside when electrical wires are down - inform the electric company. Stay inside when sidewalks are icy to prevent falls! After the storm has ended, check to see if any damage has occurred. Wear a hat, mittens/gloves, and warm clothing during snow removal. Take frequent breaks inside to get warm. Change into dry clothes if you get wet. If you are not in good health, ask/hire someone else to remove snow or storm debris. Do not try to shovel snow or move debris if you are not able or lack the skills and equipment.

Tools such as brooms, metal snow shovels and roof shovels can support clean up after the storm has passed. Only use these while standing on firm ground. Do not stand on ladders or on the roof to remove snow, ice or debris.

Call or visit friends, family and neighbors to be sure they are okay. Think of possibilities and plan ahead for winter storms. You will be better prepared.



Sources:

Snowstorms and Extreme Cold <https://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>

How to Prepare for a Winter Storm https://www.fema.gov/media-librarydata/1494008826172-76da095c3a5d6502ec66e3b81d5bb12aFEMA_2017_WinterStorm_HTP_FINAL.pdf

The National Weather Service <https://www.weather.gov/safety/winter>