

## Winter Storms

In the colder parts of the US and Canada and particularly in rural areas, we've come to expect winter storms – blizzards, sleet and freezing rain. They've been part of our lives and many rural families are "relatively" well prepared for them.

But urban families are probably more vulnerable to winter weather simply because we've taken our infrastructure for granted. Few of us have a snowmobile in our garage. We're less likely to have snow tires on our cars, or a woodstove as an extra heat source than rural families and we expect that when we turn on the lights – something will *always* happen.

This is probably why a major winter storm is particularly devastating in the city. Our transportation systems shut down, we lose power, we don't have wood stoves and many of us don't really even have "gotta go out in 3 feet of snow in sub-zero weather" clothes.

When we can't cook and we can't go out anywhere, the answer to dinner is NOT – getting a pizza delivered. And that's why winter storm preparation for city families is so important.

In the city we also need to pay special attention to our neighbors who might be extremely vulnerable to the problems of cold and isolation. Think of seniors- especially those living alone, young single parents with small children and neighbors with physical disabilities. Please keep them in mind when the temperature drops and the lights goes out.

### Before the Storm Hits

- If you have a fireplace, make sure you have lots of wood available.
- If your home is heated with oil, be sure the tank has an adequate supply.
- Check the batteries in your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Make sure you have a fire extinguisher on hand. The risk of fire always goes up when people who don't normally light a lot of wood fires are suddenly doing so to keep warm and using candles for light.
- Seal up the drafts. Cracks around windows and under doors and cool down your home really fast and since you're probably spending an unnecessary fortune on your energy consumption. This is a good idea no matter what weather you're expecting.
- Gas up your car – be sure you have at least a half tank.
- Park your car out of the way of the snow plows. Aside from the simple fact that it's difficult to comply with any bylaws that say you'll be fined if your car is in the way, digging out your car after the street has been plowed is a brutal job. If cars are in the way, the plows cannot clear the city streets and it can be a long time before they come back for a

second pass at yours. If you have space in your driveway, use it to get one more vehicle off the street.

- Ensure that everyone knows where to shut off the water (this information will be in your household family emergency plan) because if your pipes freeze and you can't correct the problem in time, there's a very good chance they will burst.
- Be sure to have a supply of water on hand for drinking, cooking and cleaning – it beats melting snow if your pipes freeze or burst.
- Stock up on some ready-to-eat food and be certain to include squeeze type or wind up flashlights, water and emergency first aid or medical supplies and necessary medications for your family in your Family Emergency Kit.
- Check your roof. If you've already got an accumulation of snow, this might be a good time to clear your roof before more snow is added to it.
- Find your pets and keep them indoors and well sheltered from the storm- don't assume that your wandering pet will be ok.
- Charge your cell phone.
- Be sure your snow blower ( if you have one) is maintained and ready to go and your snow shovels are close at hand.
- If the forecast includes freezing rain, don't drive anywhere. Once the freezing rain begins the roads rapidly deteriorate and there is a heightened risk from power lines and trees that will quickly become coated in ice and easily downed.

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

### **During the storm**

- The number one suggestion is easy. Stay Indoors.
- If your fuel is limited, use it wisely. You can shut down the heat into some rooms and lower the thermostat to conserve your energy.
- If you're using something like a kerosene heater, make sure you have good ventilation because toxic fumes can build up quickly – Do you have a carbon monoxide detector??

If you're outside during a winter storm

- Be careful when you're shoveling the snow – it's easy to over exert yourself and a heart attack when shoveling the snow is not just a cliché – and not something you ever want to happen- especially when help can't reach you.
- If it's extremely cold – cover your mouth with a scarf.
- Dress warmly. Layer your clothing with a tightly woven, hooded water repellent outer coat. Remember that mittens are warmer than gloves and that most of your body heat can be lost through your head so wear a hat.
- In a blizzard, open areas can experience almost zero visibility so do NOT wander. You can easily get lost. If you need to travel from your house to a barn or stable, be sure to string a line before the storm and follow it.
- Keep dry. Wet clothes offer no insulation from the cold.
- Watch out for frostbite. If you're losing the feeling in your extremities – fingers, toes, earlobes or the tip of your nose or if you notice them turning white or pale, it's time to find immediate medical help.

•

---

•

---

•

---

•

---

•

---

**Hypothermia**

Be aware of the symptoms of hypothermia:

- Feeling disoriented
- Loss of memory
- Incoherent
- Slurring speech
- Can't stop shivering
- Sleepiness and exhaustion

What to do:

- Get to a warm place
- Replace wet clothing with dry and wrap the person in a warm blanket
- Pay attention to warming the core of their body – don't waste hot packs on fingers and toes – warm the abdominal area to raise their core body temperature.
- If they're awake give them warm non-alcoholic beverages
- Seek medical help

### After the Storm

- Again – do not overexert yourself removing snow.
- Check your roof for snow
- Check for fallen or at risk power lines and branches after an ice storm.
- Check in on vulnerable neighbors
- Replace the supplies in your family emergency kit.

---

•

---

•

---

•

---

•

---

•

---

•