

Preparation is best way to stay safe during winter storm hazards

This is one of a series of articles prepared by the Columbia County Office of Emergency Management

One of the most common types of disaster that affects our local area is a winter storm in the form of freezing rain, sleet, ice and snow. The first line of protection is to be aware of weather conditions in your area. By observing storm warnings, adequate preparation can be made to lessen the impact of hazardous weather conditions. Learn and understand weather forecasting terms commonly used in our area.

A winter storm could isolate you in your home for several days. Be prepared to be without electricity and conventional forms of heating and cooking. Keep an adequate supply of heating fuel on hand and use it sparingly. Your regular supplies may be curtailed by storm conditions. If necessary, conserve fuel by temporarily closing off unused rooms or by keeping the house cooler than usual. Common examples of emergency heating equipment are camp stoves, kerosene heaters, or woodstoves/fire-

places. Keep in mind that there is danger of house-fire if emergency equipment is not used properly.

Things to keep on hand include simple hand tools and equipment needed to light a fire; flashlights & batteries, or a supply of candles or lanterns to provide light in case of power failure; and an emergency supply of foods that do not require refrigeration or cooking. Also stock an emergency supply of water.

Keep calm if you get in trouble:

If your car breaks down during a storm, or if you become stalled or lost, don't panic. Think the problem through, decide what is the safest and best thing to do, and then do it slowly and carefully. If a storm traps you on the road, pull off the road, stay calm and remain in your car, where rescuers are most likely to find you. Turn your directional lights or emergency flashers on, raise the hood of the car, or hang a cloth from the radio aerial or a car window. Then stay in your car and wait for help to arrive. Don't try to walk through a blizzard to safety.

Don't waste gas by running

the heater continuously. Be aware of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning. Open a window for ventilation and periodically clear away snow from the exhaust pipe.

Exercise to maintain body heat. Move arms and legs vigorously and move around within the car. Never let everyone in the car sleep at the same time. At night turn the dome light on so work crews may spot you.

Over-exertion:

Stay indoors during storms and cold snaps unless [you are] in peak physical condition. If you must venture outside, avoid over-exertion. Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you add unaccustomed exercise, such as shoveling snow or pushing a car, you may risk heart attack or stroke.

Dress to fit the weather:

Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from extremely cold air. Thin layers of loose-fitting clothing trap body heat while permitting air to circulate. Layers can be removed to prevent perspiring and subsequent chill. Outer clothing should be tightly woven, water repellant, and hooded. Mittens, snug at the

wrist, are better than fingered gloves. Remember that trapped, insulating air,

warmed by body heat, is the best protection against cold.

WEATHER FORECASTING TERMS

- **Winter Storm Watch:** severe winter weather conditions may affect your area. Freezing rain, sleet, or heavy snow may occur either separately or in combination thereof.
- **Winter Storm Warning:** severe winter weather conditions are imminent.
- **High Wind Watch:** sustained winds of at least 40 mph, or gusts of at least 50 mph or greater, are expected to last for at least one hour. (In some areas this means strong, gusty winds occurring in shorter time periods.)
- **Travelers' Advisories:** issued to indicate that falling snow, drifting snow, freezing rain, sleet, or strong winds may make driving difficult.

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