

Preparing for Winter – Oh No!

Like it or not, winter – snow, cold, ice, blizzards – will be here in no time. The National Weather Service and the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division want Iowans to be prepared.

To Do Before the Storms

- Service snow removal equipment and have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways and kitty litter to generate temporary traction.
- Make sure you have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off.
- Winterize your home. Insulate walls and attic. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows. Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
- Have safe emergency heating equipment available.
- Install and check smoke detectors.
- Keep pipes from freezing. Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers. Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture. Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing. Know how to shut off water valves.

Have Disaster Supplies on Hand

In case the power goes out, it helps to be prepared.

- Flashlight and extra batteries. Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries.
- First aid kit.
- One-week supply of food (include items that do not require refrigeration or cooking if power is shut off).
- Non-electric can opener.
- One-week supply of essential prescription medications.
- Extra blankets and sleeping bags.

When Indoors During Storms

- Stay indoors and dress warmly.
- Conserve fuel.
- Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night. Close off unused rooms.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).

When You Are Outdoors

- Dress warmly. Wear loose-fitting, layered, light-weight clothing. Layers can be removed to prevent perspiration and chill. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellant.
- Mittens are warmer than gloves because fingers generate warmth when they touch each other.
- If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. Also, take frequent breaks.
- Cover your mouth. Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors. Try not to speak unless necessary.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Keep dry.
- Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value.

- Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance - infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, nose, and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.

Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance. Warm the person's trunk first. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it (like coffee or tea) or alcohol.