pennsylvania
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

PREPAREDNESS TIP OF THE MONTH

Winter Preparedness

The National Weather Service refers to winter storms as the "Deceptive Killers" because most deaths are actually indirectly related to storms. People are injured or killed in traffic accidents on icy roads, or suffer from hypothermia due to prolonged exposure to the cold. Another major danger associated with winter storms is their ability to knock out heat, power and communications, sometimes for days at a time.

Winter Weather Terminology

In order to be better prepared, it is important to become familiar with terms used to report winter weather phenomena. Knowing the below terms will enable you to take the necessary precautions to protect you and your family.

Winter Weather Advisory	Issued for accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and sleet which will cause significant inconveniences and, if caution is not exercised, could lead to life-threatening situations.
Winter Storm Outlook	Issued prior to a Winter Storm Watch. The Outlook is given when forecasters believe winter storm conditions are possible and are usually issued 3 to 5 days in advance of a winter storm.
Winter Storm Watch	Alerts the public to the possibility of a blizzard, heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or heavy sleet. Winter Storm Watches are usually issued 12 to 48 hours before the beginning of a Winter Storm.
Winter Storm Warning	Issued when hazardous winter weather in the form of heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or heavy sleet is imminent or occurring. Winter Storm Warnings are usually issued 12 to 24 hours before the event is expected to begin.
Blizzard Warning	Issued for sustained or gusty winds of 35 mph or more, and falling or blowing snow creating visibilities at or below ¼ mile; these conditions should persist for at least three hours.
Wind Chill Advisory	Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be a significant inconvenience to life with prolonged exposure, and, if caution is not exercised, could lead to hazardous exposure.
Wind Chill Warning	Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be hazardous to life within several minutes of exposure.
Snow Flurries	Light snow falling for short durations. No accumulation or light dusting is all that is expected.
Snow Showers	Snow falling at varying intensities for brief periods of time. Some accumulation is possible.
Snow Squalls	Brief, intense snow showers accompanied by strong, gusty winds. Accumulation may be significant. Snow squalls are best known in the Great Lakes region.
Blowing Snow	Wind-driven snow that reduces visibility and causes significant drifting. Blowing snow may be snow that is falling and/or loose snow on the ground picked up by the wind.
Sleet	Rain drops that freeze into ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects. However, it can accumulate like snow and cause a hazard to motorists.
Freezing Rain	Rain that falls onto a surface with a temperature below freezing. This causes it to freeze to surfaces, such as trees, cars, and roads, forming a coating or glaze of ice. Even small accumulations of ice can cause a significant hazard.

Winter Preparation

- Winterize your home and vehicle
- Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your emergency kit:
  - ◊ Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways.
  - ◊ Sand to improve traction.
  - ◊ Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
  - ◊ Consider purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio in order to monitor critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS) so you can stay alert to changing weather conditions
- Ensure you have sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. If you have a fair place or wood burning stove, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood
- Make certain you have adequate clothing and blankets to keep warm.
- Make a Family Communications Plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather.
- Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55ºF.

During Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors during the storm.
- Maintain ventilation when using portable kerosene and gas heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel portable heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Dress for the Weather
  - ◊ If you must go outside, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
  - ◊ Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves.
  - ◊ Wear a hat. A hat will prevent loss of body heat.
  - ◊ Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy, walkways.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. Use caution, take breaks, push the snow instead of lifting it when possible, and lift lighter loads.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- Signs of Frostbite: Occurs when the skin and body tissue just beneath it freezes. Loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, earlobes, face, and the tip of the nose.
  - ◊ What to Do: Cover exposed skin, but do not rub the affected area in an attempt to warm it up. Seek medical help immediately.
  - ◊ The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends, if you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care. Because frostbite and hypothermia both result from exposure, first determine whether the victim also shows signs of hypothermia. Hypothermia is a more serious medical condition and requires emergency medical assistance.
- Signs of Hypothermia: Dangerously low body temperature. Uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion.
  - ◊ What to Do: If symptoms of hypothermia are detected take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°, seek medical attention immediately. Get the victim to a warm location. Remove wet clothing. Warm the center of the body first by wrapping the person in blankets or putting on dry clothing. Give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Seek medical help immediately.

- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive: travel in the day; don't travel alone; keep others informed of your schedule; stay on main roads and avoid back road shortcuts.

- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- If the weather becomes too dangerous to continue driving:
  - ◊ Pull off the road. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or out the window.
  - ◊ Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
  - ◊ Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
  - ◊ Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
  - ◊ Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
  - ◊ Eat regularly and drink ample fluids to avoid dehydration, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
  - ◊ Don't waste battery power; only use what is needed.
  - ◊ Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.
  - ◊ If stranded in a remote area, stomp large block letters in an open area spelling out HELP or SOS and line with rocks or tree limbs to attract the attention of rescue personnel who may be surveying the area by airplane.
  - ◊ If necessary, leave your vehicle and proceed on foot once the severe weather conditions pass.

After a Winter Storm

After winter storms have blown through and skies are sunny again, it can be tempting to go outside immediately, especially if you've been stuck inside for multiple days. Roads, sidewalks and other hard surfaces can still be dangerous for days after a storm and very cold temperatures may linger on. Take the following precautions after a winter storm:

- Continue to conserve food and water until you can be sure it is safe to travel to replenish your food supplies. If your area's emergency management authorities have issued an alert to boil water before drinking, be sure to heed their warnings until the alert has been lifted.
- Wait for streets and roads to be opened before you attempt to drive anywhere.
- Be extremely careful when driving. Snow and ice can melt during the day and then re-freeze to an icy glaze when the sun goes down and temperatures drop below freezing again.
- If you've lost power, use battery-powered flashlights rather than candles or other open flames for light. Many injuries and deaths result from accidental fires caused by candles during winter storms
- If your home loses power or heat for more than a few hours or if you do not have adequate supplies to stay warm in your home overnight, you may want to go to a designated public shelter if you can get there safely. Text **SHELTER** + your **ZIP code** to **43362** (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (e.g., SHELTER20472)
  - ◊ Bring any personal items that you would need to spend the night, such as toiletries and medicines.
  - ◊ Ensure to tell family and friends that you have relocated to a shelter.
- Always use caution when entering or leaving a building damaged by high winds or snow.

- After blizzards, heavy snows, or extreme cold, check for structural damage and ensure water pipes are functioning. If you suspect your pipes have frozen, call a plumber to inspect the pipes as soon as possible. If a pipe has indeed frozen and/or burst, shut off your home's water valve immediately.
- Report downed power lines and broken gas lines immediately.
- Check on neighbors, especially those who might need help, such as the elderly.

Learn From Every Storm

- Restock your emergency supplies to be ready in case another storm hits.
- Assess how well your supplies and family plan worked. What could you have done better?
- Take a few minutes to improve your family plan and supplies before the next winter storm hits.
- Talk to your neighbors and colleagues about their experiences and share tips with each other

Holiday Safety

Holiday safety is an issue that burns brightest from late November to mid-January, the time when families gather, parties are scheduled and travel spikes. By taking some basic precautions, you can ensure your whole family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season.

Watch Out for Fire Hazards

Turkey Fryers

While many subscribe to the theory any fried food is good – even if it's not necessarily good for you – there is reason to be on alert if you're thinking of celebrating the holidays by frying a turkey.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reports there have been 168 turkey-fryer related fires, burns, explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning incidents since 2002. CPSC says 672 people have been injured and $8 million in property damage losses have resulted from these incidents.

The National Safety Council discourages the use of turkey fryers at home and urges those who prefer fried turkey to seek out professional establishments or consider a new oil-less turkey fryer. But for those who don't heed that advice, please follow these precautions:

- Set up the fryer more than 10 feet from the house and keep children away.
- Find flat ground; the oil must be even and steady to ensure safety.
- Use a thawed and dry turkey; any water will cause the oil to bubble furiously and spill over.
- Fryer lid and handle can become very hot and cause burns.
- Have a fire extinguisher ready at all times.

Candles, Fireplaces and Christmas Trees

About 2,200 deaths were caused by fires, burns and other fire-related injuries in 2013, according to *Injury Facts 2015*, and 12% of home candle fires occur in December, the National Fire Protection Association reports. Increased use of candles and fireplaces, combined with an increase in the amount of combustible, seasonal decorations present in many homes means more risk for fire.

- Keep live Christmas trees watered; a rough rule of thumb is that a typical tree might absorb a quart of water for each inch of its diameter. This means many stands need to be topped off daily.
- Never leave burning candles unattended or sleep in a room with a lit candle.
- Keep candles out of reach of children.
- Make sure candles are on stable surfaces.
- Don't burn candles near trees, curtains or any other flammable items.
- Don't burn trees, wreaths or wrapping paper in the fireplace.
- Check and clean the chimney and fireplace area at least once a year.

Decorating Hazards

Putting up decorations is one of the best ways to get in a holiday mood; however, an estimated 15,000 injuries involving holiday decorating were seen in emergency rooms during the 2012 season.

- "Angel hair" is made from spun glass, and it can irritate your eyes and skin; always wear gloves when handling it, or substitute with non-flammable cotton.
- When spraying artificial snow on windows or other surfaces, be sure to follow directions carefully; these sprays can irritate your lungs if inhaled.
- Decorate the tree with your kids in mind; move ornaments that are breakable or have metal hooks toward the top.
- Always use the proper step ladder; don't stand on chairs or other furniture.
- Lights are among the best parts of holiday decorating; make sure there are no exposed or frayed wires, loose connections or broken sockets.
- Plants can spruce up your holiday decorating, but keep those that may be poisonous (including some Poinsettias) out of reach of children or pets; the national Poison Control Center can be reached at (800) 222-1222.
- Make sure paths are clear indoors so older adults do not trip on wrapping paper, decorations, toys, etc.

Give Safely

We've all heard it's important when choosing toys for infants or small children to avoid small parts that can be pulled or broken off and might prove to be a choking hazard. Here are some additional gift-related safety tips you might not have heard about:

- Select gifts for older adults that are not heavy or awkward to handle.
- Be aware of dangers associated with lithium coin/button batteries; of particular concern is their ingestion.
- For answers to toy safety questions, check out the Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- If you buy a bicycle for a child, buy a helmet too.

Holiday Travel Safety

Many people choose to travel during the holidays by automobile, with the highest fatality rate of any major form of transportation. In 2013, 343 people died on New Year's Day, 360 on Thanksgiving Day and 88 on Christmas Day, according to *Injury Facts 2015*. Alcohol-impaired fatalities represented 31% of the totals.

- Use a designated driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol, over-the-counter or illegal drugs all cause impairment.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance being traveled.
- Put that cell phone away; distracted driving causes one-quarter of all crashes.
- Make sure the vehicle is properly maintained, and keep an emergency kit with you.
- Be prepared for heavy traffic, and possibly heavy snow.

Remember, when guests are staying in your home, make sure areas have night lights or easy-to-reach lamps in case they need to get up during the night. And, whether you are visiting someone else's home or you have guests in your home, make sure all medications are kept up and away and out of sight from young children.

Don't Give the Gift of Food Poisoning

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides some holiday food safety tips. Here are a few:

- Do not rinse raw meat and poultry before cooking
- Use a food thermometer to make sure meat is cooked to a safe temperature
- Refrigerate food within two hours
- Leftovers are safe for four days in the refrigerator
- Bring sauces, soups and gravies to a rolling boil when reheating
- When storing turkey, be sure to cut the leftovers in small pieces so it will chill quicker
- Wash your hands frequently when handling food

Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: www.pema.pa.gov
ReadyPA: www.readypa.org
Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.ready.gov
American Red Cross: www.redcross.org/prepare
National Safety Council: www.nsc.org
Department of Health and Human Services: www.hhs.gov

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The 12 DAYS of SAFETY

1. Never use lighted candles near trees or boughs
2. Keep poisonous plants out of reach of children and pets
3. Keep trees away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources
4. Make sure your tree has a stable platform
5. Choose an artificial tree that is labeled fire resistant
6. If using a natural tree, make sure it is well watered
7. Check holiday lights for fraying, bare spots, gaps in the insulation or excessive kinking in the wire
8. Turn off all tree lights and decorations when not in use
9. When putting up decorations, use a step stool or ladder to reach high places
10. Designate a sober driver
11. When preparing a meal, wash hands, utensils, sink and anything else that touches raw meat
12. Reheat leftovers to at least 165°F

Happy Holidays

NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

nsc.org