

Time to Get Winter Weather Prepared

Even though most areas of the state have already experienced their first winter precipitation this season, it's not too late for all of Oklahoma to become winter weather prepared. Toward that effort, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) and the National Weather Service (NWS) have teamed together to share information designed to assist the public in being better prepared for the season.

With winter weather comes the need to prepare your home, automobile and family to deal with the colder temperatures, as well as the possibility for snow and ice.

"It's especially timely to review winter weather travel safety plans since more people are typically on the road during the holiday period," explained OEM Director Albert Ashwood. "Before setting out on a holiday trip we encourage families to make sure they have prepared their automobile. Packing blankets, emergency food and water, flashlights, a radio and cell phone with extra batteries will help you and your family, should you become stranded because of the weather," he said.

It's also important to remember to protect your home. Adding weather stripping and insulation, keeping furnaces clean and ready to use, and being aware of cold temperatures and vulnerable pipes that might freeze mark just some of the actions that can help prevent major and costly winter weather-related damage.

In recent years, Oklahoma has experienced some devastating ice storms, which were responsible for nearly 40 deaths, power outages for hundreds of thousands and more than \$250 million in damages to cities and towns. Most recently, a winter storm delivered near blizzard conditions across parts of Oklahoma and record snow fall totals in still more areas of the state. "By following some simple tips and monitoring the media during times of severe weather, Oklahomans stand their best chance at not becoming a victim of the weather" said Rick Smith, warning coordination meteorologist with the NWS Office in Norman.

Winter weather watches and warnings will be issued by the NWS on NOAA Weather Radios and over radio and television stations so that Oklahomans can stay aware of any hazardous winter weather conditions that may arise.

Below are some winter weather preparedness tips. Citizens who would like more information on how to cope with winter weather should contact local emergency management offices in their area or visit www.srh.noaa.gov/oun for more tips, safety guidelines and winter weather definitions.

Be Aware

- Know what winter storm and blizzard watches and warnings mean.
- A National Weather Service Winter Storm watch is a message indicating that conditions are favorable for hazardous winter precipitation to develop.
- An NWS warning indicates that a winter storm is occurring or is imminent, and could threaten life and property.
- A blizzard warning means sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 mph or greater and considerable falling or blowing snow are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.
- Depend on your NOAA Weather Radio, along with local radio and television stations for weather reports.

Plan for a Winter Storm

- Develop a Family Disaster Plan for winter storms. Discuss with your family what to do if a winter storm watch or warning is issued. Everyone should know what to do in case all family members are not together when a winter storm hits.
- Understand the hazards of wind chill. Cold temperatures are even more dangerous, and potentially deadly, when combined with strong winds. The lower the temperature and stronger the wind, the more at risk you are.
- Check on family, friends and neighbors -- especially the elderly. Make sure they are prepared.
- Don't forget about the pets. Make sure they have good food and water supplies and a place to seek shelter.

- Have your car winterized before winter storm season. During winter storm season keep your car's gas tank full for emergency use and to keep the fuel line from freezing.

Protect Your Property

- Make sure your home is properly insulated. If necessary insulate walls and attic. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windowsills.
- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
- To keep pipes from freezing, wrap them in insulation or layers of old newspapers. Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture.
- Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing and know how to shut off water valves.
- Keep safe emergency-heating equipment, such as a fireplace with wood. Always be cautious in using a portable space heater. Consider storing extra heating fuel. Install and check smoke alarms.

If You Must Go Out During a Winter Storm:

- The best way to stay safe in a snowstorm is not to be out in it. Long periods of exposure to severe cold can result in frostbite or hypothermia. It is easy to become disoriented in blowing snow.
- Stretch before you do so. If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. This will reduce your chances of muscle injury.
- Avoid overexertion, such as shovelling heavy snow, pushing a car or walking in deep snow.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy sidewalks. Slips and falls occur frequently in winter weather.
- Dress in many layers and wear a hat and mittens and come inside often for warm-up breaks.
- If you start to shiver or get very tired, or if your nose, fingers, toes, or ear lobes start to feel numb or turn very pale, come inside right away and seek medical assistance. These are the signs of hypothermia and frostbite and need immediate attention.
- Let someone know your destination, your route and when you expect to arrive.
- If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle and hang a brightly coloured cloth (preferably red) on the radio antenna and raise the hood (after snow stops falling).

Make sure your Winter Storm Disaster Supplies Kit includes:

- A cell phone with extra battery or two-way radio
- Windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal
- Several blankets or sleeping bags, rain gear and extra sets of dry clothing, mittens, socks and a cap
- Non-perishable snacks like canned fruit, nuts and other high energy “munchies.” Include non-electric can opener if necessary.
- Several bottles of water. Eating snow will lower your body temperature. If necessary, melt it first.
- A small sack of sand or kitty litter for generating traction under wheels, a set of tire chains or traction mats.
- A first aid kit, flashlight with extra batteries and jumper cables
- A brightly colored cloth to tie to the antenna if you get stranded.

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