

# Winter Weather Preparedness

Winter weather is a significant threat and individuals need to prepare themselves and their families for that threat before it actually occurs. Get prepared now, before it is too late.

According to the National Weather Service, last winter was somewhat mild with a few small snow events and several significant snow events across the southern Appalachians. The prior winters have been relatively mild and that lulled everyone into a feeling that those were what a “normal” winter is like. Don’t let the past weather conditions make you complacent in preparing yourself for a winter weather emergency.

One of the most detrimental situations that arise from a winter storm is loss of electrical power. Therefore, it is very important that you have an alternative heat source for your home and enough fuel for that source to last at least three (3) days. Remember, when using alternate heat from a fireplace, wood stove, space heater, etc., use fire safeguards and properly ventilate. You can stay warmer by possibly closing off rooms that are not needed, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors, covering windows at night. Have enough food and water for your family to sustain them for at least three (3) days.

## Preparing Your Family

- ❁ Assemble a disaster supply kit. Store drinking water, canned/no-cook food, non-electric can opener, first aid kit, battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries where you can get them easily, even in the dark. Also include winter specific items such as rock salt, sand and other snow removal equipment. Have a family rendezvous location.
- ❁ Know ahead of time what you should do to help elderly or disabled friends and neighbors or employees.
- ❁ Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid a build-up of toxic fumes and always refuel outside. Keep all heaters at least three feet from flammable objects.
- ❁ Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent. Wear a hat, mittens and sturdy, waterproof boots. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extremely cold air.

## Preparing Your Car

- ❁ Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair. Winterize your car by checking your car battery, ignition system, thermostat, lights, flashers, exhaust, heater, brakes, defroster and tires. Ensure that your car has adequate antifreeze, windshield washer fluid and oil and check regularly throughout the season.
- ❁ Place a winter emergency kit in each car that includes a shovel, windshield scraper, flashlight, battery powered radio, extra batteries, water, snack food, extra hats and

mittens, blanket, tow chain or rope, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and fluorescent distress flag.

- ❁ If traveling by car during a winter weather advisory or winter storm watch, do so in daylight, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule and route, and stay on main roads. Avoid driving during a winter storm warning or blizzard warning.

### **Preparing Your Home**

- ❁ House fires pose an additional risk, as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions. Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them.
- ❁ Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic, insulate walls and attics, and apply caulk and weather-stripping to doors and windows.
- ❁ Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.
- ❁ Take measures to protect pipes from freezing. Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- ❁ Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).

Being prepared for a winter storm is one thing that we can all do to ensure the safety of ourselves and our families. Most of us probably remember the Blizzard in March of 1993 that affected 26 States and portions of Canada. Winter Storms can completely immobilize entire cities and communities. Utilities can be interrupted for extended periods of time and communications systems can fail. Will you be prepared for the next winter storm?

For more information on Winter Weather Preparedness, please contact the McMinn County Emergency Management Agency at 423-744-5256.

Also, for more information, check out the following links:

FEMA's READY site - <http://www.ready.gov>

FEMA's READY Kids site - <http://www.ready.gov/basic-disaster-supplies-kit>

Tennessee Emergency Management – [www.tnema.org](http://www.tnema.org)

National Weather Service, Morristown, TN - <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/mrx/>