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State Emergency and Health Officials Urge Preparedness in Response to Extreme Cold Forecasts

SACRAMENTO – In response to forecasts for unusually cold temperatures throughout much of California in the coming days, officials with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the California Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) today urged Californians to prepare themselves, their family members, and their animals for the possible effects of the inclement weather.

The National Weather Service has reported to OES that temperatures will drop into the 20 and 30s Wednesday night into Thursday, followed by daytime temperatures in the mid 40s in most areas. On Friday and into the weekend, temperatures will drop further, reaching the high teens to low 20s in most areas at night, and continued daytime lows in the mid 40s.

"Exposure to extreme cold can be dangerous to your health," said Dr. Mark Horton, State Public Health Officer. "To protect yourself in extremely cold weather remember to wear several layers of clothing, travel with caution and be alert for the symptoms of exposure. Monitor family members and those around you who are at greatest risk from exposure, such as seniors, young children and people with underlying illnesses or chronic conditions."

"The safety of all Californians is our utmost concern," said OES Director Henry Renteria. "The emergency advance planning efforts we engage in with our state and local partners ensure that any all support that the State can provide local governments over the coming days is available."

Coordination with partner State agencies currently includes the California National Guard and the California Department of Food and Agriculture working with local government officials to make armories and fair grounds available to supplement their sheltering needs. Currently, there are 11 California National Guard armories that have been opened as shelters from the cold in Gilroy, Sunnyvale, Santa Cruz, Merced, Sylmar, Ventura, Los Angeles (Federal Ave), Culver City, Santa Ana, Fullerton, and Glendale. They are opened daily from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m.

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Horton and Renteria urged Californians to take action today to reduce their risk of health-related problems and property damage. They also stressed the importance of checking on family members and neighbors who are elderly or have special needs.

Actions that can be taken to help protect against severe cold and freezing temperatures include:

1) Preparing your home and family

- Review and update your family emergency plan.
- Replenish your emergency supply kits including battery-operated radio and flashlights.
- Have extra blankets on hand.
- Have a plan for meeting the needs of infants, children, seniors and those with disabilities.
- 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.
- Move family pets indoors or to an enclosure out of the elements. Likewise protect livestock or other large animals from the cold weather.
- Move plants indoors or cover with blankets or plastic to prevent freezing.
- Maintain a sufficient supply of heating fuel.
- Insulate pipes and allow faucets to drip during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk, as people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- **Do NOT bring heating devices into the home that are intended for outdoor use**, such as barbecues and other cooking equipment or other fuel burning devices. These items can produce deadly carbon monoxide.
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- Hire a contractor to check the structural ability of the roof to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow - or water, if drains on flat roofs do not work.

2) Dressing for the Weather

- 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.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

3) Traveling with caution

- Have your car winterized and make sure it is working properly.
- Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread.
- Augment your car's emergency supply kit with a shovel, windshield scraper and blankets.

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- Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.
- Check road conditions before departing.
- Let others know of your route and your estimated time of arrival.

4) Recognizing symptoms of exposure

- Confusion, dizziness, exhaustion and shivering are signs of hypothermia. Possibly: if you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.
- Gray, white or yellow skin discoloration, numbness or waxy skin are symptoms of frostbite. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.
- In the case of overexposure to freezing temperatures, remove wet clothing and immediately warm the body with a blanket or warm fluids like hot cider or soup. Avoid caffeine or alcohol.

For more information on preparing for emergencies, visit the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Web site at www.oes.ca.gov. For health-related information, visit the Department of Health Services Web site at www.dhs.ca.gov.

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