

# Winter Storm Preparedness and Response

## SAFETY AT HOME AND WHILE TRAVELING

**Winter storms are worth serious consideration in Wisconsin. Blizzards, heavy snow, freezing rain and sub-zero temperatures hit hard and frequently across the state. Even if you think you are safe and warm at home, a winter storm can become dangerous if the power is cut off. With a little planning, you can protect yourself and your family from the many hazards of winter weather, both at home and on the road.**

### BE AWARE OF THE FORECAST

- ◆ *Winter weather advisory.* Formerly called a “travelers' advisory,” this alert may be issued by the National Weather Service for a variety of severe conditions. Weather advisories may be announced for snow, blowing and drifting snow, freezing drizzle, freezing rain (when less than ice storm conditions are expected), or a combination of weather events.
- ◆ *Winter storm watch.* Severe winter weather conditions may affect your area (freezing rain, sleet or heavy snow may occur either separately or in combination).
- ◆ *Winter storm warning.* Severe winter weather conditions are imminent.
- ◆ *Freezing rain or freezing drizzle.* Rain or drizzle is likely to freeze upon impact, resulting in a coating of ice glaze on roads and all other exposed objects.
- ◆ *Sleet.* Small particles of ice, usually mixed with rain. If enough sleet accumulates on the ground, it makes travel hazardous.
- ◆ *Blizzard warning.* Sustained wind speeds of at least 35 miles per hour are accompanied by considerable falling and/or blowing snow. This is the most perilous winter storm, with visibility dangerously restricted.
- ◆ *Wind chill.* A strong wind combined with a temperature slightly below freezing can have the same chilling effect as a temperature nearly 50 degrees lower in a calm atmosphere. The combined cooling power of the wind and temperature on exposed flesh is called the wind-chill factor.

### BE PREPARED AT HOME

- ◆ *Keep a battery-powered radio and flashlights in working order; stock extra batteries.*
- ◆ *Store food that can be prepared without an electric or gas stove.*
- ◆ *Stock emergency water and cooking supplies.*
- ◆ *Have candles and matches available in case of a power outage.*
- ◆ *Have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off.*
- ◆ *Have some kind of emergency heating equipment and fuel (a kerosene heater, a gas fireplace or wood-burning stove or fireplace) so you can keep at least one room of your house warm if power is cut off. (See the fact sheet “Staying Warm in an Unheated House.”)*

## IF STRANDED ON THE ROAD

**If your vehicle becomes stalled or stopped in a winter storm, follow these tips until help arrives.**

◆ **Keep calm and stay in your vehicle. Do not attempt to walk out of a blizzard. You are much more likely to be found by staying in your vehicle.**

◆ **Keep fresh air in your vehicle — especially if you are using a candle, solid fuel or other type of heating device — to prevent carbon monoxide build-up and oxygen starvation.**

◆ **Run motor and heater sparingly and only with the down-wind window open for ventilation. Make sure snow has not blocked the exhaust pipe.**

◆ **Turn on dome light at night. This helps make the vehicle visible for work crews.**

◆ **Keep watch. Do not permit all occupants to sleep at once.**

◆ **Exercise. Clapping hands and moving arms and legs vigorously will help keep you awake and improve circulation.**

### **Additional resources:**

The National Weather Service and local radio stations, your county family living agent, the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

### **Related publications:**

"Winter Travel Awareness,"

## BE PREPARED IN YOUR CAR

Keep your car "winterized" with antifreeze. Carry a winter car kit that includes a windshield scraper, flashlight, candle and matches, tow chain or rope, shovel, tire chains, blanket, extra mittens, bag of sand or salt, a fluorescent distress flag and an emergency flare.

## RIDING OUT A STORM AT HOME

If you are isolated at home, listen to the radio or television for updates on weather conditions. Conserve fuel by keeping your house cooler than usual and by temporarily "closing off" heat to some rooms. When emergency heating methods must be used, maintain adequate ventilation to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. (See the fact sheet, "Staying Warm in an Unheated House.")

Dress accordingly. Layer your clothing; many layers of thin clothing are warmer than single layers of thick clothing. If you need to go outdoors or the heat is off indoors, wear mittens; they are warmer than gloves. Wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of the head. Cover your mouth with scarves to protect your lungs from directly inhaling extremely cold air.

If shoveling snow isn't critical, don't do it. If you must shovel snow, take your time and lift small amounts. Over-exertion can bring on a heart attack — a major cause of death during and after winter storms.

## IF TRAVELING IN BAD WEATHER

◆ *Use public transportation, if possible.* Try not to travel alone during a storm.

◆ *Make sure your vehicle is in good operating condition, winterized, properly serviced and equipped with snow or all weather tires.* Be sure your headlights, taillights and windows are clean so you can see and be seen.

◆ *Listen to your radio for weather information.*

◆ *Always fill your gas tank before entering open country, even for short distances.* You are less likely to get stranded with a full tank. If you do get stranded, you will have enough gas to run the motor and heat the vehicle.

◆ *Let someone know your departure time, expected arrival time and route.*

◆ *Seek shelter immediately if the storm seems severe.* Don't be foolhardy.

◆ *Drive carefully and defensively.* Don't try to save time by traveling faster than road and weather conditions permit.

◆ *Never carry spare fuel inside the vehicle or the trunk.* Gasoline fumes can build up and cause a violent explosion.