



Oneida County Emergency Services

Citizen Preparedness

Winter Weather Safety*

*Source: The New York State Office of Emergency Management

National Weather Service Warnings

Winter Storm Warning

Issued for a combination of heavy snow and/or ice, of which, at least one exceeds or meets warning criteria. Winter weather is expected to cause life-threatening public impact for a combination of winter hazards including heavy snow, ice, near blizzard conditions, blowing and drifting snow and/or dangerous wind chills.

Ice Storm Warning

Issued for a ½ inch or more of ice accumulation that causes damage to power lines and trees. Ice Storm Warnings are issued when there is a high degree of confidence that the entire event is expected to be ice.

Blizzard Warning

Issued when blizzard conditions are imminent or expected in the next 12 to 24 hours. Blizzard conditions include sustained or frequent gusts of or above 35 mph AND considerable falling, blowing and drifting of snow reducing visibilities frequently 1/4 mile.

Lake-Effect Snow Warning

Issued for 7 inches or more of lake-effect snow.

Wind Chill Warning

Issued when the wind chill is expected to be -25F or less. Frostbite can occur in less than 10 minutes.

Home Safety

Family Disaster Plan

Families should be prepared for all hazards that affect their area and themselves. Follow these basic steps to develop a family disaster plan:

Learn your community's warning signals.

Meet with your family to create a plan. Pick two places to meet: a spot outside your home for an emergency such as fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school). Choose an out-of-area friend as your family check-in contact for everyone to call if the family becomes separated.

Implement your plan. Post emergency telephone numbers by the phones. Install safety features in your house such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Inspect your home for potential hazards and correct them. Have your family learn basic safety and first aid measures. Make sure everyone knows how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local emergency medical services phone number. Have disaster supplies on hand.

Home Emergency Supplies

Winter has arrived and you should stockpile the following supplies in the event a winter storm or power outage prevents you from leaving your home.

Flashlights and extra batteries

Battery-operated radio and extra batteries

Emergency non-perishable foods that do not require refrigeration

Non-electric can opener

Bottled water

One week supply of essential medicines

Extra blankets and sleeping bags

First aid kit and manual

Fire extinguisher

Emergency heating equipment, used properly

WINTERIZE YOUR HOME

*Take the time now to get your home ready for the winter season by following these tips:

Have your heating system checked by a professional annually. This will ensure that your system is working safely and efficiently which, in turn, will save you money. If you heat by wood, clean your fireplace or stove. Have your chimney flue checked for any buildup of creosote and then cleaned to lessen the risk of fire.

Make sure your home is properly insulated. If necessary, insulate walls and attic. This will help you to conserve energy and reduce your homes power demands for heat.

Caulk and weather-strip doors and windowsills to keep cold air out.

Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside. This will provide an extra layer of insulation, keeping more cold air out.

Inspect and flush your water heater.

Clean gutters. Leaves and other debris will hamper drainage.

Replace batteries of smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors. If you did not do it when you set the clocks back, do it now.

To keep pipes from freezing:

Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers

Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture

Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing

Know how to shut off water valves

STAYING WARM INDOORS

If your heat goes out during a winter storm, you can keep warm by closing off rooms you do not need.

Use only safe sources of alternative heat such as a fireplace, small well-vented wood or coal stove or portable space heaters. Always follow manufacturers instructions.

Dress in layers of lightweight clothing and wear a cap.

Eat well-balanced meals.

Losing your heat when winters winds are howling is not pleasant. However, by following these simple tips, you will weather the storm more comfortably.

PROTECTING WATER PIPES

To prevent the mess and aggravation of frozen water pipes, protect your home, apartment or business by following the simple steps below.

Before Cold Weather

Locate and insulate pipes most susceptible to freezing, typically those near outer walls, in crawl spaces or in the attic.

Wrap pipes with heat tape (UL approved).

Seal any leaks that allow cold air inside where pipes are located.

Disconnect garden hoses and shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets. This reduces the chance of freezing in the short span of pipe just inside the house.

When It's Cold

Let hot and cold water trickle at night from a faucet on an outside wall.

Open cabinet doors to allow more heat to get to un-insulated pipes under a sink or appliance near an outer wall.

Make sure heat is left on and set no lower than 55 degrees.

If you plan to be away: (1) Have someone check your house daily to make sure the heat is still on to prevent freezing, or (2) drain and shut off the water system (except indoor sprinkler systems).

If Pipes Freeze

Make sure you and your family knows how to shut off the water, in case pipes burst. Stopping the water flow minimize the damage to your home. Call a plumber and contact your insurance agent.

Never try to thaw a pipe with an open flame or torch.

Always be careful of the potential for electric shock in and around standing water.

IF THE LIGHTS GO OUT

If you lose electrical service during the winter, follow these tips:

Call your utility first to determine area repair schedules. Turn off or unplug lights and appliances to prevent a circuit overload when service is restored. Leave one light on to indicate power has been restored.

To help prevent freezing pipes, turn on faucets slightly. Running water will not freeze as quickly.

Protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning:

DO NOT operate generators indoors; the motor emits deadly carbon monoxide gas.

DO NOT use charcoal to cook indoors. It, too, can cause a buildup of carbon monoxide gas.

DO NOT use your gas oven to heat your home -- prolonged use of an open oven in a closed house can create carbon monoxide gas.

Make sure fuel space heaters are used with proper ventilation.

Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to help reduce food spoilage.

GENERATOR SAFETY

Electric generators can provide you with piece of mind and convenience when you are faced with a temporary loss of electric service.

Follow these safety guidelines when operating a generator:

Before installing a generator, be sure to properly disconnect from your utility electrical service. If possible, have your generator installed by a qualified electrician.

Run generators outside, downwind of structures. NEVER run a generator indoors. Deadly carbon monoxide gas from the generators exhaust can spread throughout enclosed spaces. Install a carbon monoxide detector.

Fuel spilled on a hot generator can cause an explosion. If your generator has a detachable fuel tank remove it before refilling. If this is not possible, shut off the generator and let it cool before refilling.

Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Most of the small, home-use portable generators produce from 350 to 12,000 watts of power. Overloading your generator can damage it, the appliances connected to it, and may cause a fire. Follow the manufacturers instructions.

Keep children away from generators at all times.

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a silent, deadly killer claiming about 1,000 lives each year in the United States. Such common items as automotive exhaust, home heating systems and obstructed chimneys can produce the colorless, odorless gas. The gas can also be produced by poorly vented generators, kerosene heaters, gas grills and other items used for cooking and heating when used improperly during the winter months.

NEVER run generators indoors. Open a window slightly when using a kerosene heater.

NEVER use charcoal to cook indoors.

NEVER use a gas oven to heat your home.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include sleepiness, headaches and dizziness. If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, ventilate the area and get to a hospital.

FIRE SAFETY

Wood-burning stoves, fireplaces and heaters can add a cozy glow, but make sure you are using them safely.

Always keep a screen around an open flame.

Never use gasoline to start your fireplace.

Never burn charcoal indoors.

Do not close the damper when ashes are hot.

When using alternative heat sources such as a fireplace, woodstove, etc. always make sure you have proper ventilation. Keep curtains, towels and potholders away from hot surfaces.

Have your chimney checked before the season for creosote buildup -- and then clean it.

Have a fire extinguisher and smoke detectors ... and make sure they work! Establish a well-planned escape route with the entire family.

KEROSENE HEATERS

If you use kerosene heaters to supplement your regular heating fuel, or as an emergency source of heat, follow these safety tips:

Follow the manufacturers instructions.

Use only the correct fuel for your unit.

Refuel outdoors **ONLY** and only when the unit is cool.

Keep the heater at least three feet away from furniture and other flammable objects.

When using the heater, use fire safeguards and ventilate properly.

Remember, the fire hazard is greatly increased in the winter because alternate heating sources often are used without following proper safety precautions.

CLEARING YOUR ROOF

As the snow and ice continues to build up, homeowners should think about safety before trying to clear the snow from their roof. Here are some safety tips:

When possible, use long-handled snow rakes or poles.

If you must use a ladder, make certain that the base is securely anchored. Ask a friend, neighbor or adult family member to hold the ladder while you climb.

Know where the snow is going to fall before clearing the area.

Make certain not to contact electrical wires.

If possible, do not attempt to clear the roof alone.

If you are afraid of heights or think the job is too big for you, HIRE HELP.

Clearing roofs is a dangerous task. However, if you think safety, and work safely, you will get the job done.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

Safety First for Kids

Hey, kids! Winter can be a fun-filled time when enjoying outdoor activities such as skiing, skating and sledding. However, before going out, follow these safety tips:

The best way to stay safe in a snowstorm is to stay inside. Long periods of exposure to severe cold increase the risk of frostbite or hypothermia.

If you go out to play after the storm, dress in many layers of clothing and wear a hat and mittens. Many layers of thin clothing are warmer than a single layer of thick clothing. One of the best ways to stay warm is to wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of the head.

Come inside often for warm-up breaks.

If you start to shiver a lot or get very tired, or if your nose, fingers, toes or earlobes start to feel numb or turn very pale, come inside right away and tell an adult. These are signs of hypothermia and frostbite. If you experience these symptoms, you will need immediate attention to prevent further risk.

Remember these tips when you go out to play.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

If someone you know is elderly or dependent on life-sustaining or health-related equipment such as a ventilator, respirator or oxygen concentrator, you should make plans now to ensure their needs are met during severe winter weather and possible power outages.

Help them stock a home disaster kit including a flashlight and extra batteries, a battery-operated radio, bottled water, non-perishable foods, essential medicines, and extra blankets or sleeping bags.

Check on them after a storm or power outage. Register them as a special needs customer with their utility so they will become a priority customer. Notify others who could provide help such as neighbors, relatives, nearby friends and local emergency responders such as the fire department.

Have a list of emergency numbers readily available.

Have a standby generator or an alternative source of power available. Be aware of the safety rules for its use.

Protecting Pets

Winter is a time we should pay close attention to the safety of our pets. Here are some safety tips to follow:

Ingesting anti-freeze can be fatal for your dog or cat. It has a sweet taste and even a tiny amount can cause severe kidney damage and even death. If you spill some, soak it up immediately. (Clay kitty litter works well. Discard the litter once the anti-freeze has been absorbed.)

Pets that live outdoors should be fed a bit more in the winter because they need the extra calories to stay warm. They also should have fresh water put out a couple of times a day, or consider a special bowl that prevents the water from freezing.

If your pet goes outdoors, be aware of the temperature. Pets can get frostbite very easily on the ears, tail and paws.

When walking your dog, check the paws to make sure that ice is not building up between the toes and that salt from the roads is not irritating the skin.

If your dog is a swimmer, keep it on a leash around open water or unstable ice. Hypothermia can set in quickly and the dog may be unable to get out of the water.

Before you start your car, you should honk the horn to make sure that a cat has not decided to nap in a warm spot under the hood of the vehicle.

If decorating for the holidays, keep ornaments out of the reach of your pets. Remember that poinsettias, holly, mistletoe and other plants can be toxic if ingested.

ROAD SAFETY

When winter storms strike, do not drive unless necessary.

If you must travel, make sure your car is stocked with survival gear like blankets, a shovel, flashlight and extra batteries, extra warm clothing, set of tire chains, battery booster cables, quick energy foods and brightly-colored cloth to use as a distress flag.

Keep your gas tank full to prevent gasoline freeze-up.

If you have a cell phone or two-way radio available for your use, keep the battery charged and keep it with you whenever traveling. If you should become stranded, you will be able to call for help, advising rescuers of your location.

Make sure someone knows your travel plans.

Winterize Your Vehicle

Preparing your vehicle for the winter season now will help ensure your vehicle is in good working order when you need it most.

Have a mechanic check the following items on your vehicle:

Battery

Wipers and windshield washer fluid

Antifreeze

Ignition system

Thermostat

Lights

Exhaust system

Flashing hazard lights

Heater

Brakes

Defroster

Oil level

Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. You may also want to carry a set of tire chains in your vehicle for heavy snow conditions.

Keep a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal and maintain at least a half tank of gas throughout the winter season.

Finally, plan long trips carefully. Listen to the local media report or call law enforcement agencies for the latest road conditions.

Drive Safely

The leading cause of death and injuries during winter storms is transportation accidents.

Before getting behind the wheel this winter season, every driver could learn a lesson from our school bus drivers. It is elementary, but we have to keep our vehicles clear of ice and snow. Good vision is a key to good driving.

Plan your stops and keep more distance between cars. Be extra alert. Remember, snowdrifts can hide smaller children. Moreover, always match your speed to the road and weather conditions.

Trapped in a Car

What would you do if a blizzard trapped you on the road?

Here are some tips to follow:

Stay in your car and wait for help to find you.

Run your engine for short periods of time to stay warm. Keep your down-wind window open and make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of snow.

Turn on the dome light at night when you are running the engine to signal rescuers.

Hang a brightly colored piece of cloth or piece of clothing from your car.

Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.

OUTDOOR SAFETY

Dress for the Season

Winter has arrived and you should dress for the season.

Wear loose, lightweight, warm clothing in several layers. Trapped air between the layers acts as an insulator. Layers can be removed to avoid perspiration and subsequent chill.

Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent and hooded.

Always wear a hat or cap on your head since half of your body heat could be lost through an uncovered head.

Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs from extreme cold.

Mittens, snug at the wrist, are better than gloves because fingers maintain more warmth when they touch each other.

Physical Exertion

Winter storm conditions and cold waves are the deadliest types of weather.

Cold temperatures put an extra strain on your heart. Heavy exertion, such as shoveling snow, clearing debris or pushing a car, increase the risk of a heart attack.

To avoid problems, remember these tips:

Stay warm, dress warm and SLOW DOWN when working outdoors.

Take frequent rests to avoid over exertion.

If you feel chest pain -- STOP and seek help immediately.

Winter Sports Safety

New York State offers an abundance of sports activities during the winter season. From skiing and snowboarding to ice climbing, hiking and other outdoor pursuits, parents and children should follow the safety rules of the sport.

Most importantly, use the proper equipment and check to make sure everything is in proper working condition. A well-fitting ANSI/SNELL certified helmet will assure a safer, more enjoyable wintertime experience whether you are skiing, sledding, snowboarding or skating.

Dress in multiple, lightweight layers to stay warm and dry while enjoying the outdoors. Check the weather forecast but be prepared for anything.

If you are heading into the backcountry, never travel alone. Let someone know your route and estimated time of return.

Skiers and snowboarders should go on runs that are appropriate for their ability. Stay in control at all times and be able to stop or avoid other people or objects. Obey all posted signs and warnings.

No matter what sport you participate in, always focus 100 percent of your attention on the activity and the terrain you are on. Moreover, rest when you are tired.

Safe Sledding

Winter is a fun time for children, but it also may be dangerous. Parents should be aware of some simple safety tips for their children when they go sledding or tobogganing:

Children should never use streets or roads for sledding unless they are blocked off from traffic.

Children should sled only during daytime hours.

Do not sled on icy hills. Sledding hills should be only snow covered.

Avoid sledding over snow bumps or anything that may cause the sled to become airborne.

Never sled alone. An adult should always accompany small children.

Children should stay out of the paths of other sledders. In addition, if the slopes become busy, they should move off them quickly.

Parents, if you are sledding with your children, follow these rules yourselves.

Safe Skating

Winter is a fun time for children, but it also may be dangerous. Parents should be aware of some simple safety tips for their children when they go ice-skating:

If possible, skate at areas that have been approved and posted for ice-skating.

Never skate alone. Always have at least two people present.

Children should never be allowed to skate on a pond unsupervised.

Remember ice thickness is never consistent on lakes and ponds. Water currents, particularly around narrow spots, bridges, inlets and outlets are always suspect for thin ice.

Stay away from cracks, seams, pressure ridges, slushy areas and darker areas that signify thinner ice.

Never skate after dark.

Hypothermia

Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can cause hypothermia, especially in children and the elderly.

Watch for these symptoms:

Inability to concentrate

Poor coordination

Slurred speech

Drowsiness

Exhaustion

Uncontrollable shivering, followed by a sudden lack of shivering

If the person's body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, get emergency medical assistance immediately! Remove wet clothing, wrap the victim in warm blankets and give warm, non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated liquids until help arrives.

Frostbite

People working or playing outdoors during the winter can develop frostbite and not even know it. There is no pain associated with the early stages of frostbite, so learn to watch for these danger signs:

First, the skin may feel numb and become flushed. Then it turns white or grayish-yellow. Frostbitten skin feels cold to the touch.

If frostbite is suspected, move the victim to a warm area. Cover the affected area with something warm and dry. Never rub it!

Then get to a doctor or hospital as quickly as possible.

Snow Blower Safety

Do you have a snow blower? Did you know that most snow blower injuries happen because the operator did not read the operating instructions?

So, read your owners manual and follow these tips:

Never leave your snow blower running and unattended.

Make sure the discharge chute is not aimed at passing motorists or pedestrians.

Never put your hands into the discharge chute or augers to clear stuck snow and ice.

Never add fuel when the engine is running and hot.

Make sure you know how to turn the machine off quickly.

Additional Information

SEMO Weather Page

NOAA Weather Radio

NOAA - Wind Chill Information

NYS Travel Information Gateway