

A winter storm can range from moderate snow over a few hours to blizzard conditions that last several days. Some winter storms may be large enough to affect several states, while others may affect only a single community. All winter storms are accompanied by low temperatures and blowing snow, which can severely reduce visibility. A **Sever Winter Storm** is one that drops four (4) or more inches of snow during a 12-hour period or six (6) or more inches during a 24 hour span. An

### **Ice Storm**

occurs when freezing rain falls and freezes immediately on impact. All winter storms make walking and driving extremely hazardous.

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## **A Message from the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management**

### **Winter Weather Awareness Tips**

#### **Be Aware**

- Know what winter storm and blizzard watches and warnings mean.
- A National Weather Service (NWS) 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.
  - Know how to shut off water valves.
  - Install and check smoke alarms.
  - 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.

### **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 over exertion such as shoveling 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.
  - 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 colored cloth (preferably red) on the radio antenna and raise the hood (after snow stops falling).

### **Make sure your Winter Storm Disaster Supplies Kit includes:**

#### **[For COMPLETE info on a Disaster Kit, CLICK HERE](#)**

- 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.
- Jumper cables
- A first aid kit
- A flashlight with extra batteries
- A brightly colored cloth to tie to the antenna if you get stranded.

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### **Additional info from your Comanche County Emergency Management (CEM) team!**

#### **Winter Storm Warning**

Indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.

### **Blizzard Warning**

Large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

### **Traveler's Advisory**

Is issued if travel is expected to be difficult or dangerous.

### **Frostbite and Hypothermia**

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white pale appearance of fingers, toes or nose and ears is one of the first signs of frostbite. Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops due to prolonged exposure to temperatures less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness and exhaustion. Elderly people are affected by this quite often and should be checked on during cold weather events.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, warm the person and seek immediate medical assistance. Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine or alcohol in it.

### **Wind Chill**

Wind chill is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the actual temperature and the speed of the wind are combined. A strong wind, combined with a temperature of just below freezing can have the same effect as a still air temperature about 35 degrees colder. Dress warmly in layers and always wear a hat to hold in body heat.

### **Kerosene Heaters**

Use only correct fuel for your unit and follow the manufacturer's instructions to include adequate ventilation. Remember that kerosene heaters produce carbon monoxide, a deadly odorless gas that can kill quickly at high levels. Stay alert for family members that experience drowsiness and flu like symptoms. Maintain a carbon monoxide detector if a kerosene heater is in use. If the detector activates or you notice symptoms, turn off the appliance and open windows to ventilate the area. Move the occupants of the dwelling to fresh air and call 911 immediately.

### **Before a Winter Storm**

Follow the advisories issued by forecasters, which describe the location, strength and movement of the storm. Service snow removal equipment and have ice melter on hand to melt ice on walkways, and kitty litter to generate temporary traction. Make sure you have sufficient

heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be unavailable. Winterize your home by insulating walls and the attic, caulk and weather-strip doors and windows, and install storm windows or cover windows with plastic on the inside. Have safe emergency heating equipment available such as a fireplace with an ample supply of wood, a small, well-vented wood, coal or camp stove with fuel, or portable space heaters or kerosene heaters. All of these heat sources will create carbon monoxide, which is an odorless deadly gas. Have a carbon monoxide detector installed in your dwelling and always provide adequate ventilation when these products are in use. Keep pipes from freezing. Wrap pipes with insulation or layers of old newspapers and 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. Never attempt to thaw frozen pipes with a blowtorch or other flame-producing object. Have the recommended emergency supplies on hand. Move cars out of the roadway to allow plows and emergency vehicles access. Check on neighbors to make sure they know about the impending situation. Assist elderly or disabled neighbors with their preparations

### **If Indoors**

Stay indoors and dress warmly. Be alert for signs of carbon monoxide poisoning and hypothermia. Conserve fuel. Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 60 degrees at night. Close off unused rooms. Listen to the radio or television for the latest storm information or emergency instructions.

### **If Outdoors**

Dress warmly. Wear loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Layers can be removed to prevent perspiration and chill. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves because fingers share warmth when they touch each other. Cover your mouth. Protect your lungs from extremely cold air. Try not to speak. Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing cars can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia. Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent loss of body heat.

### **If Trapped in a Car**

Do not leave the car unless help is visible within 100 yards. Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia. Display a trouble sign. Hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna. Keep the tail pipe clear of snow build up and run the engine for about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. Open a down-wind window slightly for ventilation. Keep a winter travel kit in the trunk with a small amount of sand in a covered container, a blanket, extra mittens and a few candles and a pack of matches in a non-flammable container (1 pound coffee can). The candle will provide warmth in the vehicle if you are stuck in your vehicle for an extended period of time. Do minor exercises to keep up circulation. Clap your hands and move arms and legs occasionally. If more than one person is in the car, take turns sleeping. For warmth, huddle together. Use

newspapers, maps or floor mats for added insulation. If you must drive during a major winter storm, let someone know where you are going and what time you plan to arrive. Advise them of your route of travel and tell them you will call when you arrive.

### **After a Winter Storm**

Be patient. It will take time for plows to clear the snow from the roadways. Major routes will have priority. Secondary roads and residential areas will be cleared next. Remove parked cars from the street to assist in the plowing efforts. Do not allow children to build snow tunnels or forts near the roadways. During plowing operations they can collapse and trap children under the snow. Check on your neighbors and help each other dig out. If you have a long driveway, call a private contractor to plow it out. Do not call for government resources to clear your driveway. They are not permitted to do so. If you have a 4 wheel drive vehicle, volunteer to assist in transporting medical personnel to hospitals or patients to necessary treatment (kidney dialysis, cancer treatments, etc). Emergency Medical Services may be too busy with emergency calls to assist in routine medical needs.