

Routt County Office of Emergency Management



Emergency Preparedness & Response News

Winter Storms & Extreme Cold

While the danger from winter weather varies across the country, nearly all Americans, regardless of where they live, are likely to face some type of severe winter weather at some point in their lives. Winter storms can range from a moderate snow over a few hours to a blizzard with blinding, wind-driven snow that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures and sometimes by strong winds, icing, sleet and freezing rain.



Keep Up With the Conditions

One of the primary concerns is the winter weather's ability to knock out heat, power and communications services to your home or office, sometimes for days at a time. Heavy snowfall and extreme cold can immobilize an entire region.

The National Weather Service refers to winter storms as the "Deceptive Killers" because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Instead, people die in traffic accidents on icy roads and of hypothermia from prolonged exposure to cold. It is important to be prepared for winter weather before it strikes.

Before Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

To prepare for a winter storm you should do the following:

- Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your **emergency kit**:
 - ☒ Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways. Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for a complete list of recommended products.
 - ☒ Sand to improve traction.
 - ☒ Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
 - ☒ Sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
 - ☒ Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Make a Family Communications Plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together, and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Be alert to changing weather conditions.

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- Minimize travel. If travel is necessary, keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

Winterize Your Home



- ☒ Winterize your home to extend the life of your fuel supply by insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic.
- ☒ 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.
- ☒ Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected every year.
- ☒ Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing. Running water, even at a trickle, helps prevent pipes from freezing.
- ☒ All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside and kept clear.
- ☒ Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk, as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- ☒ Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- ☒ Insulate your home by installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic from the inside to keep cold air out.
- ☒ 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.

Carbon Monoxide

Caution: Carbon Monoxide Kills

- ☒ Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Locate unit away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.
- ☒ The primary hazards to avoid when using alternate sources for electricity, heating or cooking are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock and fire.
- ☒ Install carbon monoxide alarms in central locations on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas to provide early warning of accumulating carbon monoxide.
- ☒ If the carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door.
- ☒ Call for help from the fresh air location and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you.



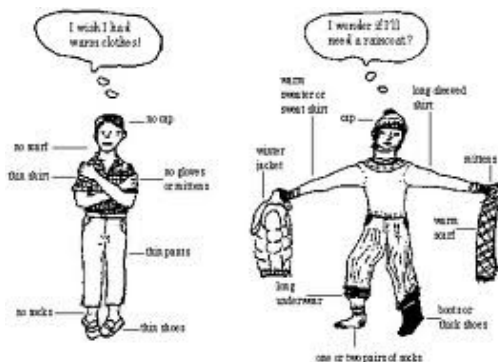
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During Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors during the storm.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy walkways.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Get medical help as soon as possible.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive: travel in the day, don't travel alone; keep others informed of your schedule; stay on main roads; and avoid back road shortcuts.
- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three (3) feet from flammable objects.
- Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.



Dress for the Weather



- If you must go outside, 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. A hat will prevent loss of body heat.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

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Stranded in a Vehicle

If a blizzard traps you in the car:

- ☒ Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.
- ☒ Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- ☒ Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ☒ Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- ☒ Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- ☒ Eat regularly and drink ample fluids to avoid dehydration, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- ☒ Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs—the use of lights, heat, and radio—with supply.
- ☒ Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.
- ☒ If stranded in a remote area, stomp block letters in an open area spelling out HELP or SOS and line with rocks or tree limbs to attract the attention of rescue personnel who may be surveying the area by airplane.
- ☒ Leave the car and proceed on foot—if necessary—once the blizzard passes.



After Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

- Go to a designated public shelter if your home loses power or heat during period of extreme cold. Text SHELTER + your Zip Code to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: shelter 12345).
- Continue to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in several layers. Stay indoors, if possible.