

Blizzard and Winter Storm Safety Tips

Snowstorms create dangerous situations for people traveling and walking outside, but blizzards also pose risks to people who are in the relative safety of their own homes. There are preventive measures you can take to promote safety during dangerous winter weather.

Winter Storm Watches and Warnings

If you know the terminology used by weather forecasters you will better understand what kind of winter weather is headed your way:

- "Frost warnings" and "freeze warnings" mean that temperatures are expected to drop below freezing, or 32 degrees Fahrenheit.
- The phrase "winter weather advisory" means that fresh snow, blowing snow, sleet or ice are expected to cause hazardous conditions, particularly for motorists.
- A "winter storm watch" means that a storm is possible in your area.
- A "winter storm warning" means a storm is currently, or will soon be, occurring in your area.
- A "blizzard warning" means that strong winds and snowfall are expected to cause low visibility, deep snowdrifts and life-threatening wind chill temperatures. If you are outside, you should seek shelter immediately.

When winter storm "watches" and "warnings" are issued, stay tuned to local radio and television stations for further information. Be alert to the changing weather conditions around you and try to avoid traveling unless absolutely necessary.

Preparing Your Home

These tips can help you endure blizzards and other strong winter storms in the relative safety of your own house.

- Add winter storm-related items to your household disaster supply kit. These include rock salt or sand, snow removal equipment and de-icing spray for locks. The general items you should have in the kit include bottled drinking water, canned and no-cook food, a non-electric can opener, first aid kit, flashlight, and a battery-powered radio with extra batteries. Keep the kit in an easily accessible place.
- If you use heating oil to fuel your furnace, be sure you have enough to last several days. Have emergency heating equipment in case your electricity or gas service is interrupted. Blankets and comforters are also valuable for keeping warm.
- Only purchase heaters with the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) safety listing.
- Make sure the heater has a thermostat control mechanism and that it will switch off automatically in case the heater falls over.
- Keep all portable heaters at least three feet away from flammable objects. Place kerosene heaters in areas where there is plenty of ventilation to avoid a buildup of toxic fumes. Always refuel them outside to avoid the risk of fire.
- House fires frequently occur during winter storms because people are forced to use alternative heating methods. Make sure you have a fire extinguisher and that everybody in the house knows how to use it.
- To help keep your house warm, install storm windows, or seal existing windows in plastic weather stripping. Seal any cracks where outside air may get into your house with caulk or insulation.

- Winterize your home and other structures that could provide shelter for your family, neighbors, pets and livestock during a blizzard. These include barns, sheds and unattached garages.
- Prune back tree branches and limbs that could fall on your house during a storm.
- Make sure water pipes are insulated, and allow faucets to drip during cold weather. This helps prevent the pipes from freezing and bursting. Know how to shut off the main water valves in your home in case a pipe does burst.
- Clean out the rain gutters and repair leaks in your roof. Have a contractor inspect your roof to see if it is structurally sturdy enough to hold the weight of a large accumulation of snow or ice.
- Invite elderly or disabled friends and neighbors to stay with you if you feel they may need special assistance or care during the storm.

Going Outside During a Storm

If you have to go outside during a blizzard, dressing in several layers of clothing will keep you warmer than just wearing one winter coat. Wear a winter hat, sturdy boots and gloves or mittens. Cover your mouth with a scarf or wrap to protect your lungs from the cold air. Wear water-repellent clothing if you have it.

If you are walking outside, it is important to let somebody know where you are going, when you will be back and what route you are taking on your trip. Bring a cell phone with you in case you have to call for assistance. Walk carefully through deep snow and on icy sidewalks. Avoid overexertion by walking at a constant and steady pace. Do not run and avoid doing physically strenuous work.

When a Storm Has Passed

When a winter storm is over, it will leave behind a lot of snow, ice and problems. Here are some tips for staying safe once the snowflakes have settled:

- Continue to listen to local radio and television stations for updated news. They will have information on utility outages, emergency rescue services and blocked roads.
- Many people every year suffer heart attacks while shoveling snow because it takes a lot of exertion. Borrow a snowblower from a neighbor instead of doing the job manually. Take frequent breaks to avoid exhaustion and undue strain if you have to shovel by hand.
- Remove ice and excessive snow from tree limbs and the roof of your house. The remarkable weight of deep snow can snap branches and cause roofs to collapse.
- Check on elderly or disabled neighbors and others who may need special assistance such as those with infants.
- Avoid driving until snowplows have had the chance to clear the streets and travel conditions have improved.

Resources

- Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.fema.gov
- National Weather Service (NWS): www.weather.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 833-955-3403

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: southdakota

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