

# Winter Weather Preparedness

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.

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.

## Winter Storms Home Preparedness Checklist

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
- Sand to improve traction
- Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment
- Sufficient heating fuel, like dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm
- Make a Family Emergency 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. Visit [www.preparemetrokc.org](http://www.preparemetrokc.org) and click the link "My Plan" to make a plan.
- 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. If you don't have a weather radio the Riverside Office of Emergency Management sells NOAA radio along with the Price Chopper stores at a cost of \$29.95.
- Minimize travel, but keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle. Visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) and click build a kit for more information.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather
- Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water

## During the Winter Storm

- 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, and 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: 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: uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms of hypothermia 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)
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes
- Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three 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