

Winter Weather Safety Tips

Winter weather can strike with little warning and is especially problematic during holidays and peak travel times. Many of us know from the recent weather events in Nebraska that winter storms can lead to electrical outages, road closures, and can cause us to be homebound or trapped at hotels and airports. Winter weather definitely adds risk to our home, work and travel activities.

If we haven't done so already, it is not too late to do some planning for this winter season and to prepare our cars and homes. We can also assist our older adult family members and neighbors by including them in our emergency plans and safety activities.

Tip #1- Plan ahead for winter travel.

Every year thousands of travelers get stuck off the road due to closure or icy conditions. You can call ahead (511) for road conditions before you decide to travel. Before you travel, make sure that you have winterized your car by having adequate antifreeze, wintertime windshield wiper fluid and good tires. South Heartland staff also encourage you to make an Emergency Kit for your car, which may include:

- A fully charged cell phone and extra battery or charger.
- Shovel, sand, ice scraper
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Non-perishable food, medications and water
- A change of clothes and snow boots
- Jumper cables
- First Aid Kit including emergency flairs and a flashlight

The Ready.gov website is a helpful resource when planning for the winter months ahead. This website provides information to help us prepare for natural disasters, including winter-specific planning ideas. It has lists of items for preparing emergency kits, including a variety of planning tools that are appropriate for seniors, families with young children, individuals with special disabilities or language barriers, and people with pets.

Tip #2 – Understand the dangers of extreme cold.

Be smart about exposure to the cold by staying out of the frigid temperatures, especially if there are windy conditions. If you have to go out, dress warmly covering as much skin surface as possible with a hat, scarf, mittens and several layers of loose fitting clothing. Avoid staying out for more than a few minutes at a time. According to the National Weather Service Wind Chill Chart, frostbite can occur in 30 minutes or less with as little as 20 miles per hour wind if the actual temperature is 0 degrees. A colder temperature and/or faster wind speed results in frostbite occurring even faster. Cold weather places an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, ask your health care provider about shoveling snow or doing other work outdoors.

Tip #3 – Prepare your home.

Preparing your home could save you thousands of dollars in damages, can help cut costs on utilities and can be lifesaving. Taking these few steps now may help prevent expensive repairs and safety concerns in the future:

- Tune up your heating system - schedule a check for carbon monoxide and oil the fan.
- Caulk drafts around windows and doors and improve insulation in attics or walls as needed.
- Check your roof for loose or missing shingles and clear gutters.
- Check for fire hazards due to clogged fireplace or wood stove (chimney inspection).
- Drain water from lawn irrigation systems and exterior faucets to avoid frozen pipes.
- Make sure you have functioning smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide monitor.

Tip #4 – Take steps to prevent falls.

People of all ages have a higher risk of falls in the wintertime. Here are some tips to reduce falls in winter, brought to us by Falls Free (Nebraska Older Adult Falls Coalition), Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and South Heartland District Health Department:

- Focus on Footwear: Rubber soles, especially those with plenty of tread, provide better traction on snow and ice than either leather or plastic soles, making them the best selection.
- Beware of Black Ice: It's just as slippery as regular ice, but difficult to see, making it a top winter safety concern. Stay on clear pathways or ones that have been treated with sand or salt.
- Clear a Path: Clear your snowy or icy walks and steps to improve safety for everyone – including postal service workers and children walking to school. Assist older adults and elderly neighbors and relatives by offering to clear their walks.
- Make Winter Safety a Priority: Avoid rushing and allow yourself extra time to reach your destination safely. Avoid short-cuts through snow or over icy areas.
- Walk Like a Penguin: When walking on ground that is slippery with ice or snow – take short, shuffling steps, curl your toes under and walk flatfooted.

For more information about preparing for cold weather hazards, see the booklet *Extreme Cold: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety* from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The booklet is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/pdf/extreme-cold-guide> or by contacting South Heartland District Health Department at (402) 462-6211 or toll free at (877) 238-7595 or visit our website: www.southheartlandhealth.org.

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