

WINTER EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND SAFETY: ESSENTIAL TIPS TO STAY SAFE AND WARM

By Jennifer Keizer, Emergency Management Coordinator

As winter approaches, it brings with it a unique set of challenges and risks. From freezing temperatures to hazardous driving conditions, being prepared for emergencies during winter is crucial for your safety and well-being. Whether you're planning for heavy snowfall or simply wanting to be ready for unexpected winter storms, here are some essential tips to help you safely navigate the colder months:

Prepare Your Home

- **Chimneys:** If you use a fireplace or wood stove, have your chimney cleaned and inspected by a professional. Creosote build-up is the number one cause of chimney fires.
- **Fireplace Ashes:** Place ashes in a sealed metal container and store at least 10 feet from combustible materials including your home and wood decks.
- **Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors:** Test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and change your batteries twice a year. Pro-tip: Since we still have daylight savings, change your batteries every time you change your clock.
- **Stock Emergency Supplies:** Keep a stockpile of essentials such as non-perishable food, water, medications, and blankets. Include a flashlight, batteries, and a battery-powered radio in your emergency kit.

Winterize Your Vehicle

- **Check Tires:** Check that your tires have adequate tread and are inflated to the correct pressure. Consider using winter tires for increased traction on snow and ice.
- **Emergency Kit:** Pack a winter emergency kit for your vehicle, including items like a blanket, extra clothing, non-perishable snacks, a shovel, ice scraper, jumper cables, and sand or kitty litter for traction.

- **Maintain Fuel Levels:** Keep your gas tank at least half full to prevent fuel line freezing and make sure you have enough gas to keep warm if you become stranded.

Stay Informed

- **Monitor Weather Conditions:** Stay updated on weather forecasts and advisories. Be aware of approaching storms or extreme cold warnings in your area. Look into purchasing a NOAA All Hazards Weather Radio to receive important alerts.
- **Emergency Alerts:** Sign up for emergency alerts to stay informed about potential hazards or evacuations. Puget Sound Fire uses Alert King County to push out emergency notifications and alerts. Make sure you are signed up with your cell, email and home phone to receive these important notifications. Sign up at kingcounty.gov/alert.

Plan for Emergencies

- **Communicate:** Ensure family members or neighbors know your plans and how to contact you in case of an emergency.
- **Evacuation Plan:** Have a plan in place for evacuating your home if necessary and know where you can go for shelter if you need to leave.
- **Medical Needs:** If you or a family member relies on electrically powered medical equipment, have a backup plan in case of power outages.

Winter Pet Safety Tips

- **Outdoor activity:** While dogs need outdoor exercise, take care not to leave them outside for long periods of time in the cold. Dogs and cats are safer inside during inclement weather.

Chemicals:

Antifreeze and de-icing chemicals can be hazardous to our furry friends. In-fact many of the antifreeze solutions have a sweet taste that can attract animals. Wipe up spills and keep the antifreeze stored and sealed in containers.

Salt and other chemicals used to melt snow and ice can irritate a pet's paws. Wipe their paws with a damp towel when they come inside before your pet licks them and irritates their mouth.

- **Vehicles:** Never leave a pet locked inside a car during extremely cold weather. Cars can act like a refrigerator, holding in cold air, putting your pet at risk.

After the Storm

- **Check on Others:** After a severe storm, check on elderly neighbors or those who may need assistance to make sure they're safe and have the supplies they need.
- **Clear Snow Safely:** When clearing snow from walkways and driveways, take breaks, use proper lifting techniques, and avoid overexertion.
- **Inspect for Damage:** Inspect your home and property for any damage caused by winter weather, such as roof leaks or frozen pipes.

By taking these proactive steps to prepare for winter emergencies, you can minimize risks and increase your safety and comfort in the colder months. Preparation is key to handling any unexpected challenges that winter may bring. Stay informed, stay safe, and stay warm! ■

MAKE IT THROUGH

For more information about preparedness, please visit www.makeitthrough.org.



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