**Winter Storms**

**What is a winter storm?**

A winter storm can range from moderate snow over a few hours to blizzard conditions with blinding wind-driven snow that last several days. All winter storms are accompanied by low temperatures and blowing snow, which can severely reduce visibility. A severe winter storm is one that drops 4 or more inches of snow during a 12-hour period, or 6 or more inches during a 24-hour span.

An **ice storm** occurs when freezing rain falls from clouds and freezes immediately on impact. All winter storms make driving and walking extremely hazardous.

The aftermath of a winter storm can impact a community or region for days, weeks, and even months. Storm effects such as extreme cold, flooding, and snow accumulation can cause hazardous conditions and hidden problems for people in the affected area.

* A **winter storm watch** indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area.
* A **winter storm warning** indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.
* A **blizzard warning** means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.
* **Wind chill** is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the effects of temperature and wind speed are combined. A strong wind combined with a temperature of just below freezing can have the same effect as a still air temperature about 35 degrees colder.

**General Winter Storm Information:**

A major winter storm can last for several days and be accompanied by high winds, freezing rain or sleet, heavy snowfall, and extremely cold temperatures. People can become stranded on the road or trapped at home, without utilities or other services. The best protection against severe winter weather is to stay inside and to dress warmly by wearing loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing.

A serious danger during a winter storm is hypothermia – a condition brought on when the body temperature drops because of prolonged exposure to extreme cold. Hypothermia is not always fatal, but for those who survive there are likely to be lasting kidney, liver, and pancreatic problems.

**Health Concerns**

**Frostbite and Hypothermia**

* **Frostbite** is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.
* **Hypothermia** is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person **slowly** and seek immediate medical assistance. Warm the person’s trunk first. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

**Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it** (like coffee or tea) or alcohol. Caffeine, a stimulant, can cause the heart to beat faster and hasten the effects the cold has on the body. Alcohol, a depressant, can slow the heart and also hasten the ill effects of cold body temperatures.

**Precautions & General Tips**

* Be familiar with winter storm warning messages.
* Service snow removal equipment and have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways and kitty litter to generate temporary traction.
* Winterize your home.
* Insulate walls and attic.
* Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
* Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
* Have safe emergency heating equipment available.
* Fireplace with ample supply of wood
* Small, well-vented wood, coal, or camp stove with fuel
* Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters
* Install and check smoke detectors.
* Keep pipes from freezing.
  + Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers.
  + Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture.
  + Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing.
* Know how to shut off water valves.

**Safety on the Roads**

Our Department of Public Works gets very busy when a snow storm occurs. Please make sure to stay a safe distance away from snow removal vehicles.

Heavy snowfall and blizzards can trap motorists in their cars. Attempting to walk for help in a blizzard can be a deadly decision. Disorientation and confusion come very quickly in blowing snow. People trapped in a car during a blizzard do best to stay in the car and wait for help.

**If Indoors,**

* Stay indoors and dress warmly.
* Conserve fuel – Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night. Close off unused rooms.
* 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).
* Tune to a local radio or television station to get the latest storm information.

**If Outdoors,**

* Dress warmly: Wear loose-fitting, layered, light-weight clothing. Layers can be removed to prevent perspiration and chill. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves because fingers generate warmth when they touch each other.
* Stretch before you go out: If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. Also, take frequent breaks.
* Cover your mouth: Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors. Try not to speak unless absolutely necessary.
* Avoid overexertion: Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.
* Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia.
* 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.
* Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance – infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

**Kerosene Heaters**

Use only the correct fuel for your unit and follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Refuel outdoors only, and only when cool. Keep your kerosene heater at least 3 feet away from furniture and other flammable objects.

The National Weather Service is responsible for issuing severe weather watches, warnings and advisories to alert the public.

For more information, please visit: [www.nws.noaa.gov/severeweather/index.shtml](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/severeweather/index.shtml) and [www.weathersafety.ohio.gov](http://www.weathersafety.ohio.gov)