

Staying Safe During Severe Weather

Typically, Rochester is hit with major snowstorms or extreme cold temperatures each winter. One of the primary concerns is the winter weather's ability to disrupt communication services, heat, and power sources, sometimes the outages may last for days. It is important to be prepared for winter weather whether you are at home, outdoors, or in your car. The following is a guide for your consideration:

Before a winter storm

- Add rock salt, sand and snow shovels to your emergency supply kit.
- Prepare your car for winter weather (e.g., test heater and defrosters, put in winter grade oil, ensure all-weather or snow tires are on).
- Wear or take along several layers of loose fitting, lightweight, warm clothing and carry gloves or mittens and a winter hat and scarf.
- Stock sufficient heating fuel or wood for burning in case electricity or other fuel sources are interrupted.
- Insulate walls and attics, caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- Insulate pipes and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- Learn how to shut off water valves in case pipes freeze and burst.

If you are outdoors:

- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow to prevent a heart attack or other injuries.
- Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth.
- Stay dry or change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia including uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion.
- Assist a hypothermia victim by:
 - moving the victim to a warm location.
 - removing wet clothing.
 - putting the person in dry clothing and wrapping his/her entire body in a blanket.
 - warming the center of the body first.
 - giving warm, non-alcoholic or non-caffeinated beverages if the victim is conscious.
 - getting medical help as soon as possible.

During a winter storm

- Conserve fuel by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- Ensure your ventilation pipes are not blocked. Blockages could create a back up of carbon monoxide in your home.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary.

If you are driving:

- Travel during daylight hours.
- Travel with more than one person.
- Keep others informed of your location and schedule.
- Stay on main roads; avoid back road shortcuts.

If you become trapped or stranded in a vehicle:

- Try to move the vehicle to the side of the road if possible.
- Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.
- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you.
- Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm.
- Protect yourself from possible carbon monoxide poisoning by opening a downwind window slightly while your vehicle is running. Periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe.
- Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion.
- Huddle with passengers and use your coat, blanket, road maps, seat covers and floor mats for warmth.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Drink fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Conserve car battery power by balancing the use of lights, heat and radio with supply.
- Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.