

# Winter Home Safety Part I

## Family Disaster Plan

Families should be prepared for all hazards that affect their area and themselves.

Follow these basic steps to develop a family disaster plan:

1. Learn your community's warning signals.
2. Meet with your family to create a plan. Pick two places to meet: a spot outside your home for an emergency such as fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school). Choose an out-of-area friend as your family check-in contact for everyone to call if the family becomes separated.
3. Implement your plan. Post emergency telephone numbers by the phones. Install safety features in your house such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Inspect your home for potential hazards and correct them. Have your family learn basic safety and first aid measures. Make sure everyone knows how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local emergency medical services phone number. Have disaster supplies on hand.

## Home Emergency Supplies

Winter has arrived and you should stockpile the following supplies in the event a winter storm or power outage prevents you from leaving your home.

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- Emergency non-perishable foods that do not require refrigeration
- Non-electric can opener
- Bottled water
- One week supply of essential medicines
- Extra blankets and sleeping bags
- First aid kit and manual
- Fire extinguisher
- Emergency heating equipment, used properly

## Winterize Your Home

Take the time now to get your home ready for the winter season by following these tips:

1. Have your heating system checked by a professional annually. This will ensure that your system is working safely and efficiently which, in turn, will save you money. If you heat by wood, clean your fireplace or stove. Have your chimney flue checked for any buildup of creosote and then cleaned to lessen the risk of fire.
2. Make sure your home is properly insulated. If necessary, insulate walls and attic. This will help you to conserve energy and reduce your home's power demands for heat.
3. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windowsills to keep cold air out.
4. Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside. This will provide an extra layer of insulation, keeping more cold air out.

5. Inspect and flush your water heater.
6. Clean gutters. Leaves and other debris will hamper drainage.
7. Replace batteries of smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors. If you did not do it when you set the clocks back, do it now.
8. To keep pipes from freezing:
  - o Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers
  - o Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture
  - o Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing
  - o Know how to shut off water valves

## **Staying Warm Indoors**

If your heat goes out during a winter storm, you can keep warm by closing off rooms you do not need.

1. Use only safe sources of alternative heat such as a fireplace, small well-vented wood or coal stove or portable space heaters. Always follow manufacturer's instructions.
2. Dress in layers of lightweight clothing and wear a cap.
3. Eat well-balanced meals.

Losing your heat when winter's winds are howling is not pleasant. However, by following these simple tips, you will weather the storm more comfortably.

## **Protecting Water Pipes**

To prevent the mess and aggravation of frozen water pipes, protect your home, apartment or business by following the simple steps below.

### *Before Cold Weather*

1. Locate and insulate pipes most susceptible to freezing, typically those near outer walls, in crawl spaces or in the attic.
2. Wrap pipes with heat tape (UL approved).
3. Seal any leaks that allow cold air inside where pipes are located.
4. Disconnect garden hoses and shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets. This reduces the chance of freezing in the short span of pipe just inside the house.

### *When It's Cold*

1. Let hot and cold water trickle at night from a faucet on an outside wall.
2. Open cabinet doors to allow more heat to get to un-insulated pipes under a sink or appliance near an outer wall.
3. Make sure heat is left on and set no lower than 55 degrees.
4. If you plan to be away: (1) Have someone check your house daily to make sure the heat is still on to prevent freezing, or (2) drain and shut off the water system (except indoor sprinkler systems).

### *If Pipes Freeze*

1. Make sure you and your family knows how to shut off the water, in case pipes burst. Stopping the water flow minimize the damage to your home. Call a plumber and contact your insurance agent.
2. Never try to thaw a pipe with an open flame or torch.
3. Always be careful of the potential for electric shock in and around standing water.

*Source: <http://www.semo.state.ny.us/info/publicsafety/winterprepare.cfm>*