

## **Dealing with Severe Winter Weather**

### **Being Prepared**

Being prepared for isolation at home is important, particularly for those who live in a rural area. A severe winter storm can isolate households for 1 or 2 weeks.

Fuel and a safe type of emergency heating equipment should be available in case of power failures that would shut down standard furnaces. A camp stove with fuel or a supply of wood or coal for a fireplace could be used for emergency heat to keep at least one room of the house warm enough to live in for at least a week or two.

All family members should know how to use the emergency heating and lighting equipment safely to prevent fires or dangerous fumes. Proper ventilation in homes and barns is essential. The correct fuel should always be used in equipment for which it was designed. For example, charcoal gives off deadly carbon monoxide. Burning charcoal indoors, even in a fireplace, is dangerous. In a barn, heating elements must be safely contained and kept away from hay or other combustible materials. Barn heaters should be placed out of any animal's reach and should never be left unattended. Also, a fire extinguisher should be readily available.

A winter storm can seem deceptively mild as it begins. However, unnecessary trips should be avoided during winter storms. Persons at home when a winter storm strikes should stay there. Domesticated animals should be kept inside if possible. If they must be outdoors, proper shelter should be provided to keep them warm and dry.

Persons who must be outdoors should wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, protective clothing rather than a single layer of thick clothing. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Hoods should be worn to protect the head and face. The mouth should be covered to protect the lungs from the extremely cold air.

Anyone whose car breaks down or who becomes lost should think through the problem, decide what is the safest and best thing to do, and do it slowly and carefully. On a well-traveled road the display of a trouble signal (e.g., flashing hazard lights, a raised car hood, a bright cloth hung from the antenna or car window) usually will bring help. The person stranded should wait in the car unless help is within 100 yards of the car and reaching that help is an absolute certainty. It is very easy to become disoriented and lost during a severe storm. Pets should be left in the car.

The following precautions should be taken while awaiting assistance:

- If you run your engine to keep warm, remember to keep snow away from the exhaust pipe. Keep a window open slightly to provide proper ventilation and protection from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Do not let everyone in the car sleep at the same time.
- At night turn on the inside dome light so that work and rescue crews can spot you.

### **Things to Watch for**

If the storm lasts more than 1 or 2 days, the possibility of utility failures and interruption of services increases greatly. This can lead to extreme hardship and even death from extended exposure to cold temperatures. Animals that are left outdoors need proper shelter to keep them from dying from prolonged exposure to the cold. They require additional feed, and owners must make sure that they have water available. Although some livestock and horses eat snow and ice in the winter as a source of water, this varies among individual animals and cannot be relied on

as a source of water for all animals.

After a winter storm, the following safeguards are advisable:

- Check on neighbors and their animals. Be sure they have proper heating and sufficient supplies to get them through the emergency.
- Check roofs of your house and barns for damage from heavy snow. Remove the snow to prevent the roofs from collapsing. Avoid overexertion while clearing the snow by working slowly and taking frequent breaks, particularly if you become dizzy or tired.

Do not try to jump-start a car that has a frozen battery. This may occur if temperatures have been below 15° F (26° C) for prolonged periods. The battery may crack and leak acid. Some may explode or spark.

- Burn fires in furnaces and fireplaces at least twice a day to prevent the buildup of creosote. Never burn charcoal indoors or close a damper on a fire that has hot ashes because those actions are likely to increase the concentration of carbon monoxide in the house.

## **Supplies**

Supply kits should be prepared and stored for ready access in every area, including the home, car, and workplace. Supplies should include food, water, first aid kit, candles, and flashlights. In addition, special items should be included, such as a spare set of clothing, blankets, shovels, and grit, such as kitty litter.

Personal protection involves being properly dressed and paying special attention to the time and effort required to perform tasks. Appropriate clothing in cold climates is underwear, an insulation layer, and an outer shell that is waterproof.

An emergency supply of food and water should be stocked for humans and animals. It is practical to have some foods that do not require cooking or other preparation. Also, a 2-week supply of continual medications should always be on hand.

A battery-powered radio and extra batteries are important in case a power failure occurs so that it is possible to listen to weather forecasts, emergency information, and other advice broadcast by local authorities. Flashlights, lanterns, candles, and matches should be ready for use. Having a generator may be necessary to prevent large loss of life in intensive livestock production facilities.

Simple tools and other equipment may be needed to fight a small fire. When electricity and heat demands are greatest, the chance of fire may be increased if wiring and ventilation are inadequate. Winter storms may interrupt fire department services.

Other items to have available include blankets, first aid kit, medicines, sunglasses, baby items, emergency heating source, fire extinguisher, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, dried fruit, candy, nonelectric can opener, nonelectric clock, and a bright red cloth for rescuers to spot (this can be tied to a car antenna). Vehicles should be winterized early in the season.