

WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

"Don't let winter catch you off-guard. Winterize your homes and vehicles now, before the first major snowfall hits," said Nancy Dragani, executive director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. "Heavy snow and ice can bring down power lines for days. So, get ready now, just in case. Ensure your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working. Ensure you have enough stored food and water to supply your family for several days. Review your emergency plans. Purchase a NOAA Weather Radio to be notified of storm watches and warnings in your area."

To help prepare for the upcoming winter months, OCSWA recommends the following:

Prepare your home for winter. Cut and remove low-hanging and dead tree branches. Ice, snow and strong winds can cause tree limbs to break and fall. Have your gutters cleaned. Snow and ice can build up quickly if gutters are clogged with debris. Have auxiliary heaters, furnaces and fireplaces maintenance checked or serviced before using. If using a portable generator, read instructions thoroughly to guard against carbon monoxide poisoning. Review your homeowner's insurance policy; consider your need for flood insurance.

Prepare winter disaster kits for the home and vehicle. Refresh stored nonperishable foods and bottled water. Change the batteries in your smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and radios. Winter emergency kits should include warm clothing, blankets, flashlights, new batteries, coats, hats, gloves, a battery-operated or hand-cranked radio, first aid kit, and enough nonperishable food and water (one gallon per person, per day) to sustain each family member for at least three days. Have stored food, bottled water and supplies for your pets, *as well*.

Invest in a NOAA Public Alert/Weather Radio. Every home, school and business should have a tone-alert weather radio with a battery back-up. Weather and public alert radios are programmed to automatically sound an alert during public safety and severe weather events. Click on www.weather.gov/nwr/ for additional information.

Update your disaster preparedness plans. Every home, school, business and organization should have written plans for the different types of disasters that can occur. Review the plans with the entire family or staff. Everyone should know what to do in the event of a snow or ice storm, a prolonged power outage, a flood or fire. Post contact information for your local emergency management agency. Prepare and practice drills that require sheltering in place and evacuation. Update your emergency contact list and establish a meeting place outside of the home, school or business, where others will know where to find or meet you.

For additional information on winter weather safety and severe weather preparedness, visit OCSWA's site at www.weathersafety.ohio.gov.

Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your emergency kit:

- Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways. Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for a complete list of recommended products.
- Sand to improve traction.
- Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
- Sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Make a family communications plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Be alert to changing weather conditions.
- Minimize travel, if travel is necessary, keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.
- Bring pets / companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.