

Winter Weather Preparedness

Winter storms can create personal safety issues if you are not prepared. Following weather forecasts and paying attention to personal emergency preparedness will reduce any possible impacts to your family and your property. It is a good idea to make a habit of listening to local radio or television stations for weather warnings and advice.

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Hazards and risks associated with winter weather

- Car accidents due to slippery roadways
- Slips and falls on slippery walkways
- Falls from heights (eg: cleaning the gutters or roof)
- Hypothermia and frostbite due to exposure
- Being struck by falling objects such as tree branches
- Risks due to downed power lines or downed objects in contact with power lines
- Roof collapse or property damage under weight of snow or falling trees
- Exhaustion, exposure or dehydration
- Isolation and lack of basic supplies including prescription medications
- Stranded motorists
- Injuries while shovelling snow
- Melting snow or storm surges causing flooding
- Home fire safety risk

Preparedness resources

Emergency Management BC

- [Emergency Preparedness](#)
- [Family Emergency Preparedness Kits](#)

Environment Canada

- [Regional Weather Forecasts](#)
- [Weather Warnings](#)

BC Hydro

- [Home Outage Preparation Checklist](#)

Ministry of Transportation, DRIVE BC

- [Travellers Information](#)

Terasen Gas

- [Safety at Home and Work](#)

[Office of the Fire Commissioner](#)

Planning ahead

Although most power outages last for just a few minutes, in extreme cases such as during severe weather events, outages can last for longer periods of time. Extended power outages do happen from time to time, so it makes sense to be prepared.

Think ahead and have a flashlight, electric lantern, extra batteries and candles on supply. Remember to use candles with caution and with proper candle holders. Never leave burning candles unattended, as they can be a potential fire hazard. It is recommended to use flashlights or electric lanterns instead. Prepare for possible isolation in your home and consider an alternative safe heating system. Also ensure that you have sufficient heating fuel for fire places or wood burning stoves. Every home should have smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, sprinklers and families should have a fire escape plan in place.

It is a good idea to assess the trees on your property and trim dead branches to reduce the danger of them falling onto power lines or your house during a storm.

Stay away from fallen power lines. A hanging power line could be charged (live) and you may run the risk of electrocution. Also remember that ice, branches or power lines can continue to break and fall for several hours after the end of the storm.

Heat failure

Most home-heating systems depend on electric power. To prepare for a power failure, you may consider installing a non-electric standby stove or heater. Choose approved heating units that do not depend on an electric motor, electric fan or other electrical device to function. If the standby heating unit uses the normal house oil or gas supply, ensure that it is connected and vented properly.

Before considering the use of an emergency home generator during a power outage, check with the dealer or manufacturer regarding power requirements and proper operating procedures. Use caution and follow directions when operating generators, insuring they are in a proper well-ventilated area. Do not connect your home portable generator directly to a house wiring system without the proper installation of an approved transfer switch and an inspection and approval by an electrical inspector.

Furnace and fireplace maintenance considerations are very important in preparing for winter weather. Never use a camp stove, barbecue, or propane or kerosene heater indoors. A build-up of carbon monoxide gas in unventilated areas can be deadly.

If your home heating system fails, the following precautions may be considered:

- Remain calm - your house may remain warm for several hours.
- Avoid opening doors unnecessarily.
- During a power failure, turn off all electrical appliances.
- If you have a safe, approved alternate heat source, begin using it before the house cools down.
- Ensure that you maintain adequate ventilation.
- Stay warm by dressing in layers and bringing out extra blankets.
- Consider closing off one room for primary heating and use.
- If concerned over pipes freezing--opening a tap even a small amount may keep water moving through the system enough to keep pipes from freezing.
- Icy Conditions
- Remember, stairways and sidewalks may be icy and increase the risk of falls. Keep these areas clear and snow free. Consider using some salt, sand or other material to provide traction in these areas.

Hypothermia

Wind-chill is a combination of cold temperatures and wind conditions which may cause rapid loss of body temperature. Excess wind-chill may require special precautions for outdoor activities. If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, know how to begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance.

Evacuations

In extreme conditions, some people may want to make arrangements to stay with relatives, friends or neighbours. Listen to weather forecasts and instructions from local officials, as reception or warming centres may be set up in your community. Keep an eye out for neighbours who may be at-risk in severe conditions. Always follow the instructions of first responders and local emergency officials.

Ensure a supply of basic essentials in your home for at least 72 hours. If you must leave your home on short notice, remember to take your emergency "grab and go" kit. This should include:

- Flashlight and battery powered radio
- Extra clothing Essential medicines and toiletries
- Essential emergency supplies including water and food
- First aid kit
- Important documents, cash and family identification