

Texans with Disabilities Preparedness for Cold Weather

Some Texans with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to exposure from cold and freezing temperatures, especially Texans who use a wheelchair, are paralyzed, use a service dog, or have sensory disabilities. The following suggestions may be helpful.

Suggestions for Keeping Safe and Warm This Winter

- Organize activities outside of your home so you go out in the warmest part of the day.
- Texans who are paralyzed from the chest or waist down and individuals who have difficulty sensing and maintaining heat in their extremities are at risk for severe frostbite and need to protect their feet, pelvic areas, and hands because of circulation problems. It is important to dress for the weather by wearing several layers of clothes, keeping your head, neck, and chest covered with scarves, and wearing two pairs of thick socks under lined boots. Texans using a wheelchair should wrap a blanket over their pelvic region and limit their amount of time outside.
- To enable the full functioning of driving adaptation equipment in motor vehicles, allow your vehicle to warm up before you get in it.
- Service animals should wear a coat or cape underneath their regular harnesses and should sit or lay on blankets to protect against cold in your vehicle or on cold floors in the vehicle or on cold floors inside your home or place of destination. Sometimes it is helpful in snow to protect your dog's paws with boots or be sure to warm feet and clean any debris once inside.
- Pneumatic tires provide better traction for wheelchairs on icy surfaces. Tires for dirt bikes (sold through bicycle shops) can be used as an alternative on icy surfaces.
- Ramps should be cleared of ice by using sand or cat litter, as rock salt is poisonous to service dogs. Rock salt can also be slippery for certain types of mobility aides.

- Keep antifreeze away from your service dog and all other pets since it is deadly to animals. Antifreeze's appealing smell and taste often tempt animals. Ensure that antifreeze is stored well away from your service dogs, pets, and children. Ensure antifreeze spills are completely cleaned up and leaks are immediately repaired.
- Freezing rain will stick to canes, walkers, fore arm cuffs, and wheelchairs, making the metal parts slippery and cold to touch. Driving gloves which grip can be helpful.
- When returning wheelchairs to vehicles, it is important to first remove the tires and shake the debris and ice off of them. The tire rims, and other metal parts that may have any salt or other de-icing chemicals on them need to be wiped off to avoid rust on the metal parts.
- Prepare a back-up plan for loss of electricity if you use a ventilator or oxygen.
- Keep phone numbers handy for family and friends to call for help if needed.

Public Health Interventions

Helping educate communities about preventive steps in advance of winter and once a storm has begun will help reduce the impact of the storm. Winter storm preparation activities should include:

- Home winterization activities (insulating pipes, installing storm windows).
- Collecting winter clothing and supplies such as extra blankets, warm coats and clothes, water-resistant boots, hats and mittens.
- Assembling a disaster supplies kit containing a first aid kit, battery powered weather radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- Stocking canned food, non-electric can opener, and bottled water.
- Winterizing vehicles, keeping gas tank full, and assembling a disaster supplies car kit.

- Staying away from downed power lines.

Winter Weather Checklists

- Stock up on emergency supplies for communication, food, safety, heating, and transportation in case a storm hits.

Communication Checklist

- Make sure you have at least one of the following in case there is a power failure:
 - Battery-powered or hand-cranked radio (for listening to local emergency instructions). Have extra batteries.
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio receiver (for listening to National Weather Service broadcasts). See www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr for more information.
- Find out how your community warns the public about severe weather:
 - Siren
 - Radio
 - TV
- Listen to emergency broadcasts.
- Know what winter storm warning terms mean:
 - Winter weather advisory: expect winter weather conditions to cause inconvenience and hazards.
 - Frost/freeze warning: expect below-freezing temperatures.
 - Winter storm watch: be alert; a storm is likely.
 - Winter storm warning: take action; the storm is in or entering the area.

- Blizzard warning: seek refuge immediately! Snow and strong winds, near-zero visibility, deep snow drifts, and life-threatening wind chill.

Food and Safety Checklist

Have a week's worth of food and safety supplies. If you live far from other people, have more supplies on hand.

- Drinking water
- Canned/no-cook food (bread, crackers, dried fruits)
- Non-electric can opener
- Baby food and formula (if baby in the household)
- Prescription drugs and other medicine
- First-aid kit
- Supply of cat litter or bag of sand to add traction on walkways
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery-powered lamps or lanterns
(To prevent the risk of fire, avoid using candles.)

Water Checklist

- Leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.
- Install UL approved carbon monoxide detectors.
- Keep the indoor temperature warm.
- Allow more heated air near pipes. Open kitchen cabinet doors under the kitchen sink.
- If your pipes do freeze, do not thaw them with a torch. Thaw the pipes slowly with warm air from an electric hair dryer.

- If you cannot thaw your pipes, or if the pipes have broken open, use bottled water or get water from a neighbor's home.
- Have bottled water on hand.
- In an emergency—if no other water is available—snow can be melted for water. Bringing water to a rolling boil for one minute will kill most germs but won't get rid of chemicals sometimes found in snow.

Heating Checklist

- Have at least one of the following heat sources in case the power goes out:
 - Fireplace with plenty of dry firewood or gas log fireplace
 - Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters
- Check with your local fire department to make sure that kerosene heaters are legal in your area.
- Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- Use electric space heaters with
 - automatic shut-off switches and
 - non-glowing elements.
- Keep heat sources at least 3 feet away from furniture and drapes.
- Never leave children unattended near a space heater.
- Have the following safety equipment:
 - Chemical fire extinguisher
 - Smoke alarm in working order (Check once a month and change batteries once a year.)

- Carbon monoxide detector
- Never use an electric generator indoors, inside the garage, or near the air intake of your home because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning:
 - Do not use the generator or appliances if they are wet.
 - Do not store gasoline indoors where the fumes could ignite.
 - Use individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords to plug in other appliances.

Cooking and Lighting Checklist

- Never use charcoal grills or portable gas camp stove indoors—the fumes are deadly.
- Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns.
- Avoid using candles.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.

Car and Emergency Checklist

- Avoid traveling when the weather service has issued advisories.
- Cell phone; portable charger and extra batteries
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper
- Battery-powered or hand-cranked radio (and extra batteries)
- Flashlight (and extra batteries)
- Water
- Snack food
- Extra hats, coats, mittens

- Blankets
- Chains or rope
- Tire chains
- Canned compressed air with sealant (emergency tire repair)
- Road sand
- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- Bright colored flag
- Help signs
- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- Road maps
- Compass
- Waterproof matches and a can (to melt snow for water)
- Paper towels

Safety rules to follow in case you become stranded in your car.

- Stay with your car unless safety is no more than 100 yards away, but continue to move arms and legs.
- Stay visible by putting bright cloth on the antenna, turning on the inside overhead light (when engine is running), and raising the hood when snow stops falling.
- Run the engine and heater only 10 minutes every hour.

- Keep a downwind window fully opened or opened just a crack.
- Make sure the tailpipe is not blocked.

A new, **free** phone app for Texans stranded on the highway during snow and ice storms has been added to the Texas Extension Disaster Education Network (Texas EDEN) website. It will help users find their current location, call 911, notify friends and family, and calculate how long it is possible to run their vehicle's engine to keep warm before running out of fuel. The app called *Winter Survival Kit* can be downloaded for iPhone and Android smartphones.

Related article: <http://ohsonline.com/articles/2011/12/04/phone-app-developed-to-help-stranded-texas-motorists.aspx?admngarea=news>

References:

🌟 **Full PDF of Extreme Cold:**

http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/pdf/cold_guide.pdf

🌟 **HTML files of Extreme Cold:**

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>

🌟 **Information on Weatherization and Utility Bill Help in Texas**

<http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/texans.htm>