

MEMA PRECAUTIONS FOR EXTREME COLD WEATHER

(Courtesy of the Sudbury Senior Center)

We are entering a period with extremely low temperatures and wind chills in the forecast. We all must take precautions to minimize the dangers presented by such severe weather according to Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce. Here are some cold weather safety tips from MEMA.

- Continue to be aware of the weather conditions by monitoring media reports.
- Minimize outside activities, particularly the elderly and very young. Also, consider your pets.
- Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing, rather than a single layer of heavy clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Wear a hat, mittens and sturdy waterproof boots, protecting your extremities. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.
- Excessive exposure can lead to frostbite, which is damaging to body tissue that is frozen. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes or the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, seek medical help immediately. Slowly rewarm the affected areas as you await medical assistance.
- Hypothermia can occur in extreme cases. The warning signs are uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. If the person's temperature drops below 95 degrees, seek immediate medical care. If medical assistance is not available, slowly warm up the person, body core first, wrapping them in a blanket or using your own body heat. Do not warm the extremities first, for this drives the cold blood towards the heart and can lead to heart failure. Do not give the person alcohol, coffee, tea or any hot food or beverage. Warm liquids are best.
- Ensure you have sufficient heating fuel, as well as emergency heating equipment in case you lose electricity.
- When utilizing alternate heating sources, such as your fireplace, wood stove or space heater, take the necessary safety precautions. Keep a fire extinguisher handy; ensuring everyone knows how to use it properly. Test smoke alarms and Carbon Monoxide detectors.
- If you lose your heat, seal off unused rooms by stuffing towels in the cracks under the doors. At night, cover windows with extra blankets or sheets. Food provides the body with energy for producing its own heat.
- Be a good neighbor. Check with elderly or disabled relatives and friends to ensure their safety.

- To keep pipes from freezing, wrap them in insulation or layers of newspapers, covering the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture. Allow a trickle of warm water to run from a faucet that is farthest from your water meter or one that has frozen in the past. This will keep the water moving so that it cannot freeze. Learn how to shut off your water if a pipe bursts.
- If pipes freeze, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes or wrap them with towels soaked in hot water, starting where they are most exposed to the cold. A hand-held hair dryer, used with caution, also works well.
- Have a well-stocked Winter Home Emergency Supply Kit that includes flashlights, portable radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, bottled water and non-perishable food.
- Make sure your car is properly winterized. Keep the gas tank at least half-full. Carry a Winter Survival Kit in the trunk including blankets, extra clothing, flashlight with spare batteries, a can & waterproof matches (to melt snow for drinking water), non-perishable foods, windshields scraper, shovel, sand, towrope and jumper cables.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Winter Weather Preparedness, go to the MEMA website at www.mass.gov/mema.