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November 1, 2021

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State Agencies Remind Residents to Prepare for Winter Weather

November is Winter Weather Preparedness Month in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD – While the official start of winter is not for several weeks, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL), Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the National Weather Service (NWS) are encouraging people to begin preparing now for extreme cold, snow and ice.

“In Illinois, it’s not a question of if, but rather when will snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures occur,” **said IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau**. “Being unprepared for winter weather is not only inconvenient, but it can be dangerous. That’s why we are encouraging all Illinoisans to take a few minutes to put together your home and vehicle emergency supply kits and review the steps you should take to stay safe during hazardous winter weather.”

When checking and restocking a vehicle’s emergency supply kit, make sure it contains items such as:

- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Non-perishable snack food
- Water
- Sand or cat litter
- Shovel
- Booster cables
- Cell phone charger

“At the Illinois Department of Transportation, we spend the entire year planning and preparing to keep you safe during our challenging Illinois winters,” **said Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman.** “The public plays an important part as well. Make sure your vehicle is in safe, working condition at all times. Pack an emergency kit to store in your vehicle. Don’t crowd the plow when you’re driving. Most important, during inclement weather, ask yourself if your trip is really necessary or can be postponed.”

Winter Weather Health Hazards

Prolonged exposure to the cold can cause serious problems including hypothermia, a drop in the body’s core temperature. It doesn’t require negative temperatures and can set in when you’re outdoors or in. Hypothermia is especially dangerous and can be deadly if not detected promptly and treated properly.

Frostbite occurs when your extremities (fingers, toes, nose, and ears) are exposed to cold weather. The skin may become stiff and numb, leading to severe tissue damage. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation.

“Workers in Illinois, including first responders, construction workers and public works crews brave the elements year-round. It’s critical these workers – and others – prepare for severe conditions. While it starts with dressing properly for the weather, it’s also important your body is prepared for additional stress,” **said Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik.**

Medical professionals encourage people who must work outside regularly in the winter weather consider scheduling a physical exam before that winter work begins.

A study by the University of Illinois Chicago published in 2020 shows while there were more heat-related hospital admissions between 2011 and 2018, there were 1,935 cold-related deaths compared to 70 heat-related deaths.

Recognize Home Heating Dangers

According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) National Center for Health Statistics, in 2017, 399 people died of unintentional non-fire carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. In 2016, local fire departments in the U.S. responded to 79,600 carbon monoxide incidents, or an average of nine such calls per hour. In 2018 according to National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), Illinois Fire Departments responded to 8,965 incidents related to carbon monoxide. CO is found in fumes produced any time you burn fuel in cars or trucks, small engines, stoves, lanterns, grills, fireplaces, gas ranges, or furnaces. CO can build up indoors and poison people and animals who

breathe it. During and after a snowstorm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow build-up.

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet from all heat sources including fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, space heaters and candles.
- Create a kid-free zone around open fires and space heaters
- Never use an oven to heat your home
- Turn space heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed. Remember...space heaters need space!
- Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before being placed into a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- Install carbon monoxide and smoke detectors on each floor of your home and within 15 feet of each sleeping area.
- CO detectors have a limited life span, check the manufacturer's instructions for information on replacement.
- Use portable generators outdoors in well-ventilated areas away from doors, windows and vents.

“Home fires occur more during the winter months than any other time of the year. Heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths in the U.S. which is why we stress the importance of maintaining heating equipment and having chimneys cleaned and inspected by a professional each year.” **said Illinois State Fire Marshal Matt Perez.** “It’s also important to make sure your smoke and CO alarms are working properly and are not expired. Test those alarms monthly and replace any broken or expired alarm.”

Keep in mind, being prepared for winter doesn’t have to cost a lot of money or take a lot of time. It could be as simple as making sure your vehicle is in good winter driving condition, adding a winter survival kit to your car, changing your furnace filter at home and stocking or updating your family’s emergency supply kit. Take time now to prepare your family, home, vehicles and driving habits for everything from a dusting of snow to a major winter storm.

For more information about winter weather preparedness, visit the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov.