

Winter Weather Preparedness Bulletin

Amarillo/Potter/Randall Office of Emergency Management

The Texas Panhandle region is prone to winter weather impacts. Amarillo receives an average of 17.9 inches of snow annually during winter months. In addition, the Texas Panhandle can experience extreme cold temperatures, especially associated with the passage of cold fronts that move through the region from the northern Rocky Mountains and Plains states.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently issued the U.S. Winter Outlook that indicates a cooler and wetter winter across the southern U.S. due to a strong El Niño phenomenon in the Tropical Pacific. While this is simply an indication of what winter may hold, it serves as a reminder of the importance of preparing in advance for winter weather. Whether you live in the Amarillo area or are simply travelling through the region, resolve to be ready: Be Informed; Make a Plan; Build a Kit; and Get Involved!

Before Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

To prepare for a winter storm you should do the following:

- Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your emergency kit:
 - Rock salt or products to melt ice on walkways.
 - Sand to improve traction.
 - Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
 - 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.
- A NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts alerts and warnings directly from the NWS for all hazards. In addition, a battery powered AM/FM radio to monitor local media broadcasts is important.
- 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.

Winterize Your Vehicle

Check or have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- Antifreeze levels - ensure they are sufficient to avoid freezing.
- Battery and ignition system - should be in top condition and battery terminals should be clean.
- Brakes - check for wear and fluid levels.
- Exhaust system - check for leaks and crimped pipes and repair or replace as necessary. Carbon monoxide is deadly and usually gives no warning.

- Fuel and air filters - replace and keep water out of the system by using additives and maintaining a full tank of gas. A full tank will keep the fuel line from freezing.
- Heater and defroster - ensure they work properly.
- Lights and flashing hazard lights - check for serviceability.
- Oil - check for level and weight. Heavier oils congeal more at low temperatures and do not lubricate as well.
- Thermostat - ensure it works properly.
- Windshield wiper equipment - repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- Install good winter tires - Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions.

Update the emergency kits in your vehicles with:

- a shovel
- windshield scraper and small broom
- flashlight
- battery powered radio
- extra batteries
- water
- snack food
- matches
- extra hats, socks and mittens
- first aid kit with pocket knife
- necessary medications
- blanket(s)
- tow chain or rope
- road salt and sand
- booster cables
- emergency flares
- fluorescent distress flag

Winterize Your Home

- Winterize your home to improve efficiency by insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic.
- Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected every year.
- Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing. Running water, even at a trickle, helps prevent pipes from freezing.
- All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside and kept clear.

- Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk, as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- Insulate your home by installing storm windows or covering windows with plastic from the inside to keep cold air out.
- Hire a contractor to check the structural ability of the roof to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow - or water, if drains on flat roofs do not work.

During Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors during the storm.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy, walkways.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. Use caution, take breaks, push the snow instead of lifting it when possible, and lift lighter loads.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- Monitor for signs of hypothermia or frostbite. Seek medical help immediately if you experience these effects of exposure to extreme cold.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive: travel in the day; don't travel alone; keep others informed of your schedule; stay on main roads and avoid back road shortcuts.
- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

Dress for the Weather

- If you must go outside, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
- Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves.
- Wear a hat. A hat will prevent loss of body heat.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

Stranded in a Vehicle

If a blizzard traps you in the car:

- Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.

- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids to avoid dehydration, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs - the use of lights, heat, and radio - with supply.
- Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.
- Leave the car and proceed on foot - if necessary - once the blizzard passes.

After Winter Storms and Extreme Cold

Learn From Every Storm. Restock your emergency supplies to be ready in case another storm hits.

- Assess how well your supplies and family plan worked. What could you have done better?
- Take a few minutes to improve your family plan and supplies before the next winter storm hits.
- Talk to your neighbors and colleagues about their experiences and share tips with each other.

Learn More

- In the event of an emergency, call **9-1-1** immediately.
- For additional preparedness information, contact the Amarillo/Potter/Randall Office of Emergency Management at (806) 378-3004 or visit the NOAA Weather Ready Nation winter weather information page at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/>
- For current conditions, watches, and warnings, visit the National Weather Service, Amarillo at <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/ama/> or (806) 335-1121.
- For road conditions, visit or call...
 - Texas Panhandle: (806) 468-1488
 - Texas: <http://www.drivetexas.org/> or (800) 452-9292
 - New Mexico: <http://nmroads.com/> or (800) 432-4269
 - Oklahoma: <http://www.dps.state.ok.us/cgi-bin/weathermap.cgi> or (405) 425-2385
 - Colorado: <http://www.cotrip.org/home.htm> or (303) 639-1111
 - Kansas: <http://511.ksdot.org/> or (800) 585-7623

