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# Winter Weather Preparedness Guide

## South Dakota Office of Emergency Management

Road conditions can be found on [www.SafeTravelUSA.com](http://www.SafeTravelUSA.com), by calling 511, through radio announcements, media releases, and dynamic message signs.



### bReady South Dakota

bReadySD is a campaign encouraging South Dakotans to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses, towns, and cities.

The bReadySD campaign encourages individuals to have an emergency bReady kit, make a family emergency plan and learn more about the different threats that may affect them, from natural disasters to epidemics.

Learn more about how to prepare for emergencies at [www.bReady.sd.gov](http://www.bReady.sd.gov).

### BE PREPARED

Winter Storms, especially blizzards, can be very dangerous. Preparing before extremely cold, snowy weather occurs can save your life. Know what winter storm watches and warnings mean. If a Winter Storm Watch has been issued for your area, hazardous winter weather conditions (such as snow greater than 6 inches in 24 hours, winds gusting over 35 mph, or visibilities less than a 1/4 mile) are expected in the next 12 to 36 hours. A Winter Storm Warning means the conditions listed for the Watch exist.

Try to stay indoors during a blizzard. If you have to go outside to check on animals or for another reason, be sure to dress warmly in loose

fitting layers of clothing. Wear heavy gloves to protect your hands and heavy socks with boots that will not absorb water. Cover your mouth so that you don't breathe in freezing cold air that can damage your lungs. Keep your body dry. Know the signs of hypothermia or frostbite.

If you are traveling at all when a winter storm is possible, then you should always bring emergency supplies with you. You can never predict when you might get stranded and need them. If stranded, make sure you stay in your vehicle. Run your vehicle about ten minutes every hour. Open windows a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Make

yourself visible to rescuers by turning on the dome light at night, tie a colored cloth to your antenna, and raise the hood after the snow stops falling.

If you are caught outside, find a dry shelter and cover all exposed parts of the body. If shelter is not available, prepare a lean-to, wind break, or snow-cave for protection from the wind. Build a fire for heat and to attract attention. Place rocks around the fire to absorb and reflect heat. Do not eat snow, it will lower your body temperature. Melt it first.

Weather related dangers can be very unexpected. Being prepared for a potential hazardous situation could save your life.

### WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

The information contained in this newsletter was compiled by various agencies concerned with the safety of South Dakota citizens. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety, the South Dakota Department of Transportation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Weather Service helped make the South Dakota Winter Weather Preparedness Guide possible.

You can find the South Dakota Office of Emergency Management on Facebook and on Twitter at [@SDemergencyMgmt](https://www.facebook.com/SDemergencyMgmt)

## WINTER TRAVEL

Winter driving can be extremely hazardous at times due to poor road conditions or reduced visibilities from heavy or blowing snow. During these times, travel is difficult and not recommended. Many people still venture outdoors not knowing what they will encounter. Many winter deaths and injuries can be attributed to people becoming stranded and venturing away from their vehicle. To avoid this, you should stay inside your vehicle and wait for help.

### When traveling this winter season:

- Listen to the forecast before departing and postpone travel if inclement weather is occurring or expected.
- Avoid traveling alone. Inform others of your timetable and planned routes.
- Keep your gas tank near full.

- Adjust your speed to the condition and increase following distances.
- Carry a Winter Survival Kit in your vehicle at all times!

### Items that should be in your Survival Kit:

- Shovel and flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit and medications
- Non-perishable food, such as granola bars and peanuts
- Candles and matches
- Extra clothing, sleeping bags, or blankets
- Jumper cables and tire chains
- Battery-operated radio



- Cell phone with fully charged batteries
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Brightly colored cloth to tie on the antenna so the vehicle can be easily located

## STRANDED DURING A WINTER STORM

If you are stranded in your vehicle during a winter storm:

- Stay with your vehicle.
- Use your cell phone to call 911. Be aware of your location and situation.
- Move all your emergency supplies from the vehicle's trunk to the interior of the car as soon as you realize you may be staying for a while.
- Check your supplies to see what you have available and arrange them in order for their use. This will help you ration them in case you are stranded for a long period of time.
- Run the engine sparingly. Start with 15 minutes every hour and adjust if needed. While running the engine, keep a downwind window cracked to prevent carbon monoxide buildup.

- Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow.
- If the cold is extreme, it may be necessary to keep the engine running continuously. It may not restart if shut off.
- Never go to sleep with the engine running.
- Turn on the dome light at night while the engine is running. It may help others to locate you. Turn it off when you turn off the engine so you don't run down the car's battery.
- Put on warm clothing right away, before you start to get cold. It is easier to stay warm than it is to regain lost warmth. Loosen tight clothing so body heat can circulate. Remove metal jewelry, as it can chill you.
- Keep your feet off the floor if the

heater is not on.

- Use newspapers, maps, or even the removable car mats for added insulation.
- Do mild exercises to help you stay warm.
- Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia.
- Eat a snack of high calorie food just before sleeping to stimulate your metabolism (heat production). If you awaken due to the cold, eat some more high energy food and add another layer of insulation such as more clothing or a blanket.
- Tie a colorful banner on the car antenna. If you need to leave the car for any distance during the storm, tie a nylon rope to the car and yourself so you will be able to find your way back to the car.

## WINTER FIRE SAFETY

Winter holidays can be a joyous time for all, but nearly 50% of civilian fire deaths occur throughout the winter season: November-February. Most heating fires in South Dakota involve fireplaces and chimneys. The most dangerous place to be, with regard to fire, is in your own home. Your home can be a cozy, warm place away from a harsh winter, but it can also become dangerous if you don't take special precautions.

### Tips to Eliminate Winter Fires

- Safety around heating equipment and appliances is an important first step in reducing the threat of fire. Keep children and loose clothing at a safe distance.
- Use a yardstick to measure the distance between heating equipment and combustible material. Unless you have three feet of clearance, you are at risk.
- Always turn off portable heating appliances when leaving home or retiring for the evening. Be sure the fire in the fireplace is out before going to bed.
- Have chimneys, fireplaces, and other heating devices inspected by a qualified professional at the start of every heating season.
- Use a sturdy screen or glass closure in front of your fireplace, and burn only clean fireplace wood. Never burn treated lumber.
- Install smoke detectors on every

level of your home, including the basement, and test them monthly.

- If you smell gas in your home, contact your local utility company or qualified professional heating contractor and follow their advice.
- Inspect heat tape before using it. Never thaw frozen pipes with an open flame.

### Winter Safety Tips

- Protect neighborhood homes this winter. Keep your nearest fire hydrant clear of snow.
- After holiday parties, check wastebaskets and furniture for smoldering cigarettes.
- Place holiday decorations well away from heat sources. If you have a tree, water it daily.
- Do not burn holiday wrappings in a fireplace; it may cause a chimney fire.
- Pay attention when cooking. If a pan is on fire, cover it with a lid. Water will spread the fire.
- Turn off and unplug lights and decorations before going to bed or leaving your house. Buy electrical decorations that have been approved by a national testing laboratory. Don't overload outlets.

### Candle Burning Safety Tips

- Place candles on a secure surface in sturdy noncombustible holders that won't tip over. Make sure the holder is large

enough to catch drippings.

- Keep candles away from children and pets. Candles should be out of children's reach.
- Keep candles away from combustible items such as curtains, books, and paper. Remember the "three-foot rule" - anything combustible needs to be kept three feet from a heat source.
- Keep candles away from flammable liquids. Do not use a candle for light when fueling a kerosene heater or lantern. The flame may ignite the fumes.
- Avoid using candles during a power outage. A flashlight is a safer option. Don't carry a lit candle.
- Remember to extinguish candles when leaving the room or going to sleep. Never leave children or pets unattended in a room with a lit candle.



## PROTECTING YOUR PETS

Winter can be a particularly difficult time for pets. Give your pet a safer, healthier weather season by following these tips:

- A temperature of 10°F or below is too cold for any pet to tolerate. The physical stress of cold temperatures can make pets more susceptible to illness or infection.
- Provide outdoor dogs or cats with a dry, insulated pet house or shelter out of the wind. Staying warm demands extra calories, so increase your pet's food intake, particularly protein.
- Remove ice, salt, and caked on mud from your pet's paws and coat right away. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you suspect your pet has frostbite. Frostbitten skin may turn reddish, white, or gray, and it may be scaly or sloughing.



- Cats and kittens often nap on car engines. Knock on the hood or honk the horn then wait a few minutes before starting the car.
- Pets like the smell and taste of anti-freeze, but even a small amount can kill them. Thoroughly clean up spills at once. Tightly close containers and store them where pets cannot get to them.

- Never let your dog off its leash in the snow or ice. Dogs can lose their scent in snow and ice and become lost in the harsh weather. Make sure pets, such as dogs, always wear their ID tag.
- Don't use metal water dishes outside; your pet's tongue could stick to the frozen metal.
- Many plants, including holly, mistletoe, and poinsettia, are toxic to pets. Keep them out of your pet's reach.
- Always have fresh, clean water available.
- Dogs confined to the house because of winter weather may lack proper exercise and suffer depression. Help by giving more attention and encouraging them to be active.

## WINTER SAFETY FOR SCHOOLS

Children can be especially susceptible to the dangers associated with winter weather. Their youthful enthusiasm often takes over when common sense and safety should prevail. Even if they are cold, wet, or exhausted, they often are not conscious of the potential impact these conditions pose.

School administrators and principals need to be sensitive to the dangers winter weather can pose to children and be prepared. Winter weather procedures and practices need to be established before the onset of the winter season. When formulating a winter weather safety plan consider the following:

- The best source for the latest information is a NOAA weather radio. Most counties fall within their coverage area. Commercial radio or television should also be

monitored. Contact the county sheriff's office to ask if they will relay critical weather forecasts to the school.

- All schools need to have a functional plan in regard to closures due to snow, ice, or extreme cold.
- During the winter months, guidelines need to be established regarding outside recess periods. Temperatures and wind chills need to be monitored and criteria set as to when outside recess will be allowed.
- School bus drivers should receive extra training on driving during winter weather. Snow and ice can often accumulate quickly and unexpectedly on roads creating dangerous driving conditions.



- With many households having two working parents today, it may be necessary for some children to be brought to school early. Schools should make provisions to allow children inside school buildings as early as possible during cold weather.