

“Arkansas Winter Storms”

Winter storms in Arkansas don't rival the storms in our northern states. Occasionally we do have a severe winter storm. Emergency preparedness training should cover the winter storm warning, just as we do other natural disaster training in our state, so that we might be a well prepared group for whatever the event is, at least as much as we can foresee and prepare for.

Heavy snowfall, freezing rain, or ice storms can immobilize a large region. Even areas that normally experience mild winters can be hit with a major snow storm, ice storm or extreme cold temperatures. Winter storms can therefore result in, closed highways, blocked roads, downed power lines, hypothermia, or frostbite. Sometimes in rural Arkansas power may be out for weeks during a major ice storm, and often land line phone will suffer the same fate. Cell phone service will often fail as well, and if not the batteries are usually soon depleted.

With winter just around the corner for Arkansas consider the following in your disaster preparedness supplies:

1. Rock salt to melt ice on walkways
2. Sand to improve traction
3. Snow shovels
4. Extra fuel for the generator

Prepare for possible isolation in your home by having sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off. For example, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove. If you heat with Propane, then make sure you have a good supply before the storm. If you heat and cook with electric, make sure you have an alternate source of heating and cooking, such as propane or a wood stove.

The following are guidelines for what you should do during a winter storm.

1. If you are trained Skywarn Storm-Spotter, then remember there are criteria for reporting in winter storm reports as there are with other storms, and if you have reportable information, then by all means report in just like you would for any other storm.
2. Listen to your local repeaters, commercial radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio for weather reports and emergency information.
3. Eat regularly and drink ample fluids, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
4. Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
5. Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects
6. Avoid overexertion such as when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside, and take breaks often.

7. If you must be outside, watch for signs of frostbite. Try to find a warm place before symptoms become obvious. These symptoms include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, you should get medical help immediately.
8. If you must be outside for an extended period, make sure you are not by yourself, and then watch for signs of hypothermia in others. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms of hypothermia are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove any wet clothing, warm the center of the body first, and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Once again, get medical help as soon as possible.
9. Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive, consider the following:
 - A. Make sure you have a mobile VHF\UHF radio that is working properly. HF would always be a plus.
 - B. Travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule
 - C. Stay on main roads; avoid back road and shortcuts, and if you become stuck in a snow or Ice storm, keep these guidelines in mind:
 - a. Do your best to pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.
 - b. Call for help on your radio or cell phone if you have one.
 - c. 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 safe shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building across a field may seem fairly close, but be too far to walk safely in heavy snow or freezing rain. If help is on the way, always just stay put.
 - d. Run the engine and heater only a minimum amount to stay warm, but not comfortable. When the engine is running, open an upwind window slightly for ventilation. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
 - e. Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance your electrical energy needs—the use of lights, heat, and radio—with the supply. Especially if you don't know when help may arrive.