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1-1-2005

## Winter Weather: Tips for coping with severe winter weather

Cooperative Extension Service  
*South Dakota State University*

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### Recommended Citation

Extension Service, Cooperative, "Winter Weather: Tips for coping with severe winter weather" (2005). *SDSU Extension Special Series*. Paper 19.  
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## Winter Weather

### Tips for coping with severe winter weather

This information is an overview of the educational resources available on the South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension (SDCES) Winter Weather web site [http://sdces.sdstate.edu/winter\\_weather/](http://sdces.sdstate.edu/winter_weather/) where you will find more in-depth information. If you do not have access to the web site call your local Extension office or 605-688-4187 for a hard copy of the information.

Topics covered:

- keeping food safe
- safe drinking water
- frozen pipes
- heating the home
- ice dams on the roof
- roof snow loads
- insurance coverage and making a claim
- cleaning rugs and carpets
- what to expect in your personal, family, work, and financial life

#### Keeping food safe

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. An unopened refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours. A full freezer will hold the temperature approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.
- Placing refrigerated and frozen food in the snow is not a guarantee the food will remain safe. Sun rays may thaw the frozen food, and refrigerated foods may become too warm and allow bacterial growth.
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer while the power was out and if the temperature is 40 F or below when the power comes back on, the food may be refrozen.
- If frozen food still contains ice crystals when the power comes back on, it may be refrozen.
- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power has not been out more than 4 hours. Discard any per-

ishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers if they have been above 40 F more than 2 hours.

#### Safe drinking water

- Water safety is more of a concern following hurricanes or floods than winter storms.
- Listen to local and state officials for any concerns/recommendations regarding the safety of water in your community following a storm.
- Do not use containers to hold water that have been used previously for anything other than potable water. Even water storage tanks, like those on a fire truck, may be contain bacteria.
- CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines show how to disinfect wells and water storage tanks.

#### Frozen pipes

- Frozen pipes are often a problem in cold temperatures following an extended power outage.
- A homeowner may be able to thaw frozen pipes safely; however, it may be best to contact a plumber or similar expert.
- If pipes are frozen, shut off the water and open faucets to the frozen pipes.
- Warm the pipes with a heat lamp, blow dryer or portable heater. Be very careful; do not create a fire hazard.
- Do not use boiling water, propane torches, or any open flame to thaw frozen pipes.
- Apply only moderate heat and expect to wait for several hours.
- Open sink cabinets to let the warm air in.
- If pipes have burst seek professional help.

#### Heating the home

- Never use generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper—or

even outside near an open window.

- Do not try to use bottled gas in natural gas appliances unless you have converted the appliances to such use. Flues and piping suitable for gas burning appliances may be unsafe for use with higher-temperature oil, coal or wood smoke.
- If you use a catalytic or unvented heater, cross-ventilate by opening a window an inch on each side of the room. This will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

### **Ice dams on the roof**

- Ice dams occur when a snow-covered roof over the attic is warmer than the eaves and its snow melt runs under the snow along the eaves. When the melted snow reaches the cooler eaves, it freezes and the buildup traps the water. If this water finds its way into the building through seams or the attic, it will cause water damage.
- If you have a problem you should remove the snow from the part of the roof directly above the ice dam.
- Remove the snow using a roof rake, hoe or push broom.
- Avoid using sharp instruments such as axes to break channels through the ice. You may inflict further damage to the roof.

### **Roof snow loads**

- Roofs of older homes were built with little or no insulation, so snow melted fairly quickly and the roofs carried snow loads for very brief periods. If insulation has been added to your attic, less heat escapes, so snow and ice do not melt as rapidly and snow loads accumulate to weight levels that may be excessive. And if the roof deck was not properly ventilated when insulation was added, ice damming and a backup of snowmelt under the shingles, as well as excessive condensation due to moisture transfer from the interior of your home into the attic and rafter cavities, may occur. This creates favorable conditions for deterioration of roof structural members and a decrease in fastener holding ability.
- There is no simple way to determine snow load. Often, concern about roofs on homes or other buildings presents a dilemma. If you leave the snow and ice you risk collapse of the roof, and yet if you remove the ice snow you risk personal and/or structural injury.
- Snow load is cumulative; therefore, if you have any concerns you are advised to contact a professional such as a housing inspector, structural engineer, carpenter or architect.

### **Insurance coverage and making a claim**

- Except for damage due to flooding, most losses due to natural disasters are covered by homeowner's insurance. Few policies cover all losses.
- Contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.
- For more detailed information, see <http://www.cft.uwex.edu/ces/news/handbook.html>

### **Cleaning rugs and carpets**

- Carpets and rugs often are discarded after being soaked, but some can be saved. They may be best cleaned by professionals. If you do the work yourself, take the carpet and pad outside if possible, and drape it over a clothesline, sawhorses, automobiles, or on concrete driveways. Flush soil and silt out with a water hose and spray nozzle. Add detergent if soiled. Work detergent into carpet with a broom or brush. Rinse with a solution of one gallon of water and 2 tablespoons of household bleach. Dry completely before reinstalling.

### **What to expect in your personal, family, work, and financial life**

- The impact of a disaster or traumatic event goes far beyond the immediate moment. Just as it takes time to reconstruct damaged buildings, it takes time to grieve and rebuild lives. Life may not return to normal for months, or even years, following a disaster or traumatic event. There may be changes in living conditions that cause changes in day-to-day activities, leading to strains in relationships, changes in expectations, and shifts in responsibilities. These disruptions in relationships, roles, and routines can make life unfamiliar or unpredictable.
- Sometimes just knowing what to expect can help ease the transition back to a normal life. As you and your family begin to rebuild your lives, you may face any or all of the situations described below.

### **Personal Uncertainties**

- Feeling mentally drained and physically exhausted is normal and common.
- The loss of a home, business, or income may result in a loss of self-esteem.
- Unresolved emotional issues or pre-existing problems and previous losses may resurface.
- Anniversaries of the disaster or traumatic event remind us of our losses. This reaction may be triggered by the event date each month and may be especially strong on the 1-year anniversary.

## Family relationship changes

- Relationships may become stressed when everyone's emotions are closer to the surface, and conflicts with spouses and other family members may increase.
- When homes are destroyed or damaged, families may have to live in temporary housing or with relatives and friends, leading to overcrowding and added tension.
- Family members or friends may be forced to move out of the area, disrupting relationships and usual support systems.
- Parents may be physically or emotionally unavailable to their children following a disaster or traumatic event, because they are busy cleaning up or are preoccupied, distracted, or distressed by difficulties related to the event.
- Parents may become overprotective of their children and overstress their children's safety.
- Children may be expected to take on more adult roles, such as watching siblings or helping with cleanup efforts, leaving less time to spend with friends or participate in routine activities, such as missed basketball games.

## Work disruptions

- Fatigue and increased stress from preoccupation with personal issues can lead to poor work performance.
- Conflicts with co-workers may increase.
- Businesses may be forced to lay off employees, or work hours and wages may be cut.
- Reduced income may require taking a second job.
- Daily travel and commute patterns are disrupted, due to the loss of a car or road reconstruction.

## Financial worries

- Those who experience work disruptions may be unable to regain their previous standard of living, leading to financial concerns and unpaid bills.
- Seeking financial assistance to rebuild and repair damages adds to the already high levels of stress caused by the disaster or traumatic event, and the hassles of dealing with bureaucracy can add to the frustration.

## How to be a survivor

- Regardless of individual circumstances, everyone needs to complete several steps on the road to recovery from a disaster or traumatic event:

- Accept the reality of the loss.
- Allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness and grief over what has happened.
- Adjust to a new environment. Acknowledge that the person or possessions lost are gone forever.
- Put closure to the situation and move on. Do not continue to let the loss take its physical, emotional, or spiritual toll.
- Have faith in better times to come.

You and your family have survived a traumatic event. That doesn't mean your lives are over or that you don't deserve to be happy again or celebrate the holidays. Return to doing things you enjoy with friends and as a family. Reestablish the routines of your life. Make commitments and keep them.

If you or a member of your family has trouble coping on your own, ask for help. Consult a counselor or mental health professional.

For more details on emotional recovery after a disaster, coping strategies, identification of stress in yourself and others, helping children to cope with the disaster, and how to approach financial stresses imposed on a family as a result of a natural disaster, refer to <http://www.cft.uwex.edu/ces/news/handbook.html>

## References:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/keeping\\_food\\_Safe\\_during\\_an\\_emergency/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp)  
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The information presented here is taken directly from winter weather/winter storm web sites hosted by the USDA, the Centers for Disease Control, the South Dakota Department of Health and north-central region land grant universities.

