

# WINTER WEATHER/ EXTREME COLD

## WHAT IT IS

Winter weather includes ice, heavy snow, and extreme cold conditions. These can cause power outages and loss of heat and communications services – sometimes for many days. The greatest threat from winter weather is often from secondary impacts, such as traffic accidents on icy roads. Hypothermia and frostbite, which can result from prolonged exposure to cold, are also risks. Additionally, clean-up (shoveling) from winter weather events can be strenuous, and may therefore pose a risk for older adults and others with physical limitations.

## KEY TERMS

- ▶ A **Winter Weather Advisory** means winter weather conditions are expected and may be hazardous.
- ▶ A **Winter Storm Watch** means snow, sleet, or ice are possible — be prepared. (the next 36 to 48 hours)
- ▶ A **Winter Storm Warning** means snow, sleet, or ice are expected — take action! (within 24 hours)
- ▶ A **Frost/Freeze Warning** means below freezing temperatures are expected.
- ▶ A **Blizzard Warning** indicates sustained winds or regular gusts to 35 miles per hour or more, as well as considerable amounts of snowfall or snow drifts and near zero visibility.

## WHAT TO DO

-  **Before (Preparedness/ Mitigation)**
- Sign up for Fairfax Alerts and have a battery or crank powered NOAA weather radio available.
  - Have your furnace serviced regularly.
  - Prepare your home by salting walkways, driveways, and entrances.
  - Have emergency heating equipment.
  - Purchase a homeowner's insurance policy.
  - Plan for snow removal: have shovels on hand, or consider going in with a few neighbors for a community snow blower.
  - Turn off outside spigots and drain the pipes.
  - Learn how to operate your water's main shut off valve (in case a pipe bursts).
  - Learn First Aid.
  - Refer to "Power Outage/ Blackout" and "Medical Emergency," below.

 **During (Response)**

- Stay indoors during the storm if possible.
- Dress appropriately for cold weather. Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, warm layers, rather than one heavy layer of clothing.
- Drive only if necessary – especially if you are inexperienced in winter conditions or you have rear-wheel drive.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia, including:
  - Uncontrollable shivering
  - Memory loss
  - Disorientation

- Incoherence
- Slurred speech
- Drowsiness
- Apparent exhaustion

If signs are detected, get medical help as soon as possible.

- Watch for signs of frostbite, including loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, earlobes, or the tip of the nose.
- If you are driving and your vehicle stops working, pull off the road, turn on your hazard lights, stay in your car, and use your phone to call for help.

 **After (Recovery)**

- Be sure paved areas on your property and adjacent rights-of-way (including sidewalks) are shoveled. Un-shoveled snow is a hazard to your neighbors, and it may eventually turn to ice.
- "Adopt" a fire hydrant near your home or business and keep it clear of snow.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia or frostbite in yourself and others.
- Be careful when shoveling snow. Overexertion can cause injury and even trigger heart attacks. If you plan to shovel, stretch before going outside, take breaks, and don't overexert yourself.
- If you have neighbors who are older or have access or functional needs, shovel for them; if you are concerned about your ability to shovel, reach out to your neighbors for help.

