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PREPARING FOR WINTER WEATHER

MEMA Offers Tips to Help Keep Massachusetts Families Safe

FRAMINGHAM, MA – A winter storm in New England can range from a moderate snowfall over a few hours to a chilling Nor'easter, bringing blizzard conditions with blinding wind-driven snow that lasts several days. People can become stranded in their automobiles or trapped at home, without utilities or other services. The aftermath of a winter storm can have an impact on a community or the entire region for days, weeks or even months. Storm effects, in New England, include large snow accumulation, extremely cold temperatures, heavy, wet snow or icing on trees and powerlines, roof collapses, coastal flooding and beach erosion.

Winter storms are also deceptive killers because most deaths are indirectly related to the actual storm. The major causes are automobile or other transportation accidents, exhaustion and heart attacks caused by overexertion, 'freezing to death' and asphyxiation from improper heating sources. House fires occur more frequently in the winter due to lack of proper safety precautions when using alternate heating sources, like unattended fires and space heaters.

"As with most potential disasters, preparedness, monitoring the Media and common sense can minimize the danger to you and your family," states Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce. "That is why MEMA is sharing important winter safety information through the Media and the MEMA website over the next few weeks."

Areas to be covered in this series will include the proper steps to take to prepare your family and home for the winter season, automobile and driving safety, ice safety, protecting your pets, responding to power outages, extreme temperatures, roof collapse and recovering from a winter storm.

Those who already have an All-Hazard Emergency Supply Kit, as MEMA continues to recommend, are ahead of the curve. However, it is important to check your kit, to ensure it is properly stocked with enough supplies to survive on your own for at least three to five days. Now is also the time to review for Family Communication Plan.

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WINTER EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio with extra batteries
- Charged cell phone
- First-aid kit
- Essential prescription medicines
- Non-perishable Food
- Manual can opener
- Water (one gallon per person/per day)
- Baby items
- Extra blankets and sleeping bags
- Fire extinguisher

FAMILY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Develop a 'Family Emergency Communication Plan' in case family members are separated from one another during a winter storm (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), and have a plan for getting back together.

- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the 'family contact'. After a disaster, it is often easier to call long distance than across town. Also, calling outside the area will probably be easier than calling into a disaster area.
- Make sure everyone knows the name, address and telephone number of the contact person.
- Sometimes an emergency could impact your neighborhood or small section of town. Decide on an alternate meeting area for family members.
- Be familiar with the Emergency Plans at your children's school and your workplace.
- Be aware of the location of your community's potential emergency shelters and possible evacuation routes.

These steps can help reassure everyone's safety and minimize the stress associated with emergencies.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Winter Preparedness, go to the MEMA website at www.mass.gov/mema.