



## Winter Safety Reminders



The winter season is upon us and with it comes the beauty of freshly fallen snow, icicles glistening in the sun and outdoor scenes that rival the imagination of Thomas Kinkadee's canvases. As pleasant as these thoughts are, reality forces us to deal with the not so pleasant aspects of winter. Many of us have been stranded in a snowdrift or stuck at home with no heat during an ice storm. Winter weather can produce life-threatening situations catching the unprepared traveler, worker or homebound family off guard.

The National Safety Council has several safety tips on surviving the cold weather. These are available on their website at <http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/cold.htm>. They tell us how to avoid frostbite and hypothermia, safe snow shoveling and how to prepare for safe automobile travel in winter. We should also consider the increased risks of house fires and take precautions to reduce these risks. Here is a brief summary of these winter safety concerns and what we can do to protect ourselves.

### Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite and hypothermia are caused from overexposure to extreme cold temperatures. Obviously, the best way to avoid these conditions is to stay out of the cold, but this is not always possible. Many of us kids love to get outside and play when the temperature plunges, the snow falls and the ponds freeze over. Ways to avoid frostbite and hypothermia include:

- Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of warm, non-alcoholic beverages,
- Wear several layers of clothing that includes water and wind resistant outerwear. Remember that the head and face lose heat fast, so be sure to cover the head, neck and face.
- Keep clothing dry to maintain effective heat retention.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia and seek first aid or medical attention if necessary.

### Snow Shoveling

Shoveling snow is often a fun task for some of us, but for others it is a chore we can do without. This type of outdoor work can be invigorating, but it can also present health and safety hazards. Here are some tips to help make shoveling snow a safer job:

- Begin by dressing warm and covering all exposed skin to prevent frostbite,
- Do some stretching exercises to warm up,
- Don't eat a large meal, drink alcohol or smoke just prior to shoveling snow,
- Know your limitations, if you are middle age and out of shape, be careful,
- If you have a heart condition or other medical conditions, check with your doctor before shoveling,
- Don't over do it, pay attention to what your body is trying to tell you; breathing rate, heart rate, and blood pressure will all increase with work,
- Pace yourself, take it slow and keep it light, use a small shovel or don't fill a large one with snow,
- Watch your step, slips and falls are all too common on ice and can cause serious injury,
- Try to shovel dry snow before it becomes wet and freezes to the ground,
- Push snow out of the path with the shovel instead of lifting it,
- If you have to lift the snow in the shovel, do it right, remember to lift with your legs instead of your back. Keep your back in its natural curve to avoid increased stress and back injury.

- Don't get yourself in trouble, watch for signs and symptoms of exhaustion and heart problems. Stop immediately and get help if you feel yourself becoming ill.

### Safety on the Road

Winter driving can become extremely hazardous when storms produce snow and icy conditions. Extreme caution on the road will help reduce the risks. However, if we do get into trouble, there are things that we can do to avoid being stranded without help. Here are some tips on being prepared:

- Know before you go, especially if you are starting out on an isolated road or long trip. Listen to weather reports and long range forecasts,
- Make sure your car is in good mechanical condition,
- Keep the fuel tank full to avoid being stuck and out of gas,
- Make a list of necessary equipment and supplies for winter emergencies and carry these items in your car,
- Know what to do if you become stranded.

For more information on winter preparedness, check out this website from the National Safety Council: <http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/winter.htm>.

### Winter Fire Safety at Home

Winter weather increases the risk of house fires. Consider all the things we do at home to keep warm and comfortable. Most of these activities use fire or electricity to produce heat. Fireplaces, heating stoves, space heaters, wood burners, heat lamps, electric blankets and even candles are used to increase the temperature. All of these items increase the chances of an unexpected house fire, if not used properly. In addition, the holidays include extra lighting and combustible materials from tree trimmings to wrapping paper. Some tips for winter fire safety are:

- Use fuel heaters and electric heating appliances according to the manufacturer's safety recommendations. Read and follow the operating instructions and safety labels,
- Make sure chimneys, exhaust flues and heating equipment are clear of obstructions and working properly. Get them inspected by a qualified technician,
- Heat lamps and candles should only be used under supervised conditions and not around combustibles,
- Don't leave children unattended around open flames and electrical devices capable of producing fires,
- Keep matches and flame starters away from children; preferably locked in a cabinet,
- Make sure smoke detectors are working,
- If you use flame producing sources in the home, (gas furnaces, fireplaces, etc.) have a carbon monoxide detector installed in the house,
- Have an emergency evacuation plan in place and practice it with all members of the household,
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy and know how to use it.

Fire can be a killer that will sneak up on the unprepared family with devastating effects. Don't be a victim. Know how to protect yourself and your family. Check with your local fire department for more information.

Have a safe and fun winter season. Just by using good common sense practices and following safe operating instructions we can reduce our risks of injury and illness when dealing with the cold weather of winter.