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Are You Ready for Winter?
November 4-8 is Winter Awareness Week in Wisconsin

MADISON, Wis. – The winter of 2018-19 was one for the record books in Wisconsin, with the state experiencing heavy snowfalls and dangerously cold temperatures brought on by the polar vortex. To help prepare everyone for what to expect in the months ahead, Gov. Tony Evers has declared Nov. 4-8, 2019 Winter Awareness Week in Wisconsin.

“The extreme cold felt across Wisconsin earlier this year is a reminder of just how dangerous winter can be,” said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin’s adjutant general and homeland security advisor. “Take time during Winter Awareness Week to make sure your emergency kits are fully supplied, have your furnace serviced and get your vehicle checked out to make sure its ready for winter road conditions.”

“The time to get ready for winter weather is before temperatures drop and snow is on the ground,” said Dr. Darrell Williams, Wisconsin Emergency Management administrator. “Getting prepared now could help save your life or the life of a neighbor during a winter storm.”

Winter emergency kits should include items such as food, water, a flashlight and batteries, and blankets. In your vehicle, include a snow shovel, extra gloves and hats, and kitty litter or sand to help give your wheels traction on icy roads in case you get stuck.

According to the National Weather Service, Wisconsin experiences an average of 3-6 winter storms during a season. Last winter, the town of Saxon in Iron County received the highest seasonal snowfall total in the state at 208.3 inches of snow. Saxon also reported the highest daily snowfall total at 16.5 inches. The coldest temperature recorded in the state during the 2018-19 winter season was the village of Butternut in Ashland County, which reported a reading of -49 degrees Fahrenheit on Feb. 1, 2019.

Winter driving can be extremely hazardous. Between 2014-2018, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation says an average of 46 people were killed and almost 4,200 injured each year in crashes on icy or snow-covered roads in the state. On average, there are about 18,000 vehicle crashes in the state each year caused by poor winter driving conditions.
“When bad winter weather is in the forecast, drivers should always check current road conditions before they head out,” Williams urged. “If you don’t need to be on the road during a severe winter storm, then stay home. If that’s not an option, carry an emergency kit in your vehicle, drive slow in treacherous conditions, and let people know where you are going and when you expect to arrive.”

You can check travel conditions for most major roadways in the state by using 511 Wisconsin, which is updated with the latest traffic and road conditions. This information, along with live traffic cameras and traffic alerts, can be accessed through the free 511 Wisconsin mobile app, @511WI on Twitter, or the mobile-friendly site www.511wi.gov.

Winter Driving in Wisconsin

Know before you go this winter season with the 511 Wisconsin Traveler Information System. By downloading the free 511 Wisconsin Smartphone app, following @511WI on Twitter, or visiting www.511wi.gov you can access these current statewide travel resources:

- Road conditions
- Travel times
- Traffic delays
- Incident alerts
- Construction closures
- Traffic cameras

511 Wisconsin is a 24/7 travel service provided through the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

Driving Tips from the Department of Transportation:

- In the last five years, Wisconsin has averaged 18,000 motor vehicle crashes during the winter months when roads are covered with ice, snow or slush.
- In the last five years, an average of 46 people were killed and more than 4,200 injured in Wisconsin each winter season in crashes when roads are covered in ice, snow and slush.
- Many crashes are caused by "driving too fast for current conditions." Also, when the first blast of winter arrives, motorists often need to "re-learn" how to drive in slippery conditions.
- Be gentle with both the accelerator and brake. Don’t use cruise control in wintery conditions. Don’t be overconfident in your four-wheel drive vehicle. You may get going quicker than others but you can’t stop faster. Four-wheel drive vehicles can lose traction as quickly as two-wheel drive.
- Always wear your safety belt. You and your passengers absolutely need this protection even in low-speed “fender-bender” crashes that frequently occur on slick roads.
- Leave plenty of room for snowplows. By law, you must stay back at least 200 feet from the rear of a snowplow.
- Obey the “Move Over” Law, which requires drivers to shift lanes or slow down in order to provide a safety zone for a law enforcement vehicle, tow truck, ambulance, fire truck, highway maintenance vehicle, or utility vehicle that is stopped on the side of a road with its warning lights flashing.
- If your vehicle slides off the road, gets stuck, or becomes disabled, stay inside it if at all possible with your seat belt fastened until a tow truck or other help arrives. If you’re inside your vehicle and buckled up, you have protection against out-of-control vehicles. There’s no protection outside your vehicle.
Keep a Winter Emergency Kit in Your Vehicle

Carry a winter storm survival kit in the back seat of your vehicle (in case your trunk jams or is frozen shut) that includes:

- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Extra hats, socks and mittens
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Shovel, booster cables and windshield scraper
- Water and high-calorie non-perishable food (raisins, candy bars, energy/protein bars)
- Sand or cat litter to use for traction
- Cell phone adapter

911 tips:

- If possible, call 911 on your cell phone. Provide your location, condition of everyone in the vehicle and the problem you’re experiencing.
- Follow instructions: you may be told to stay where you are until help arrives.
- Do not hang up until you know who you have spoken with and what will happen next.
- If you must leave the vehicle, write down your name, address, phone number and destination. Place the piece of paper inside the front windshield for someone to see.

Survival tips:

- Be easy to find: Tell someone where you are going and the route you will take.
- If stuck: Tie a fluorescent flag (from your kit) on your antenna or hang it out the window. At night, keep your dome light on. Rescue crews can see a small glow at a distance. To reduce battery drain, use emergency flashers only if you hear approaching vehicles. If you’re with someone else, make sure at least one person is awake and keeping watch for help at all times.
- Stay in your vehicle: Walking in a storm can be very dangerous. You might become lost or exhausted. Your vehicle is a good shelter.
- Avoid overexertion: Shoveling snow or pushing your car takes a lot of effort in storm conditions. Don’t risk a heart attack or injury. That work can also make you hot and sweaty. Wet clothing loses insulation value, making you susceptible to hypothermia.
- Fresh Air: It’s better to be cold and awake than comfortably warm and sleepy. Snow can plug your vehicle’s exhaust system and cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter your car. Only run the engine for 10 minutes an hour and make sure the exhaust pipe is free of snow. Keeping a window open a crack while running the engine is also a good idea.

It is also important to check and winterize your vehicles before the winter season begins. Make sure your car’s battery is in good shape – cold temperatures can reduce the effectiveness of a battery by 50 percent. Make sure your tires are suitable for winter driving conditions.
Safety First - Stay Informed

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues winter storm warnings, watches and advisories. Here’s what they mean and what you should do.

Winter Weather Advisory – There is a high confidence that a hazardous winter event will occur over a 12-hour period (e.g., 3 to 5 inches of snow) but should not become life threatening if caution is used.

Winter Storm Watch – Winter storm conditions including freezing rain, sleet, and heavy snow are possible within the next 36-48 hours. Continue monitoring the weather forecast.

Winter Storm or Ice Storm Warning – A significant winter storm is occurring or will begin in the next 24-36 hours. Heavy snow (e.g., 6 inches in 12 hours) or the combination of snow, sleet, freezing rain, and moderate winds will impact travel and outdoor activities and could become dangerous or deadly. An Ice Storm Warning is issued when mostly freezing rain is expected with ice accumulations of at least ¼ inch within a 12-hour period. When a Warning is issued, take necessary precautions – consider canceling travel plans.

Blizzard Warning – A dangerous storm with winds that are 35 mph or greater in combination with falling and/or blowing snow that reduces visibility to 1/4 mile or less for a duration of at least 3 hours. Canceling travel plans is advised.

Snow Squall Warning - A short duration warning issued for a relatively small geographic area when intense short-lived bursts of heavy snowfall occur. Although rare, these snow squalls can lead to quick reductions in visibilities and often accompanied by gusty winds. Sudden whiteout conditions and slick roads can develop.

Wind Chill Advisory – Issued for bitter cold wind chills of 20 to 34 below zero (25 to 34 below zero in the northwest portion of the state)

Wind Chill Warning – Issued with wind chills of 35F below zero (40F below zero for far NW portion of Wisconsin). Frostbite is possible when outside for 10 minutes or less.

Keep Warm and Safe

Frostbite is damage to body tissue caused by extreme cold. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear tips or the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, seek medical care immediately!

Hypothermia is a condition that develops when the body temperature drops below 95˚F. It is very deadly. Warning signs include uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, slurred speech and drowsiness. Seek medical care immediately!

Overexertion is dangerous. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make an existing medical condition worse.

Pets also need extra care when the temperatures fall. They should be brought inside when the temperature reaches 30˚F with wind chill. Dogs and cats can get frost-bitten ears, nose and feet if left outside during bitter cold weather. Chemicals used to melt snow and ice can also irritate pets’ paws – be sure to keep anti-freeze, salt and other poisons away from pets.

Be Prepared at Home

Some of the dangers associated with winter storms include loss of heat, power and telephone service and a shortage of supplies. To help protect your family, now is the time to put together a disaster supply kit. Here are some items to include:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and a commercial radio
- Bottled water and non-perishable food that requires no cooking
- First-aid supplies
- Fire extinguisher, smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector
- If appropriate, extra medications and baby items
- If you have an emergency heating source such as a fireplace or space heater, make sure you have proper ventilation
- Make sure pets have shelter and plenty of food and water

For additional information, contact your county or tribal emergency management office, the National Weather Service or ReadyWisconsin.wi.gov.
Check Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control. On average, carbon monoxide poisoning sends about 500 people per year to the emergency room in Wisconsin, according to the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.

To protect your family from carbon monoxide, follow these simple safety tips:

- **Make sure you have working CO detectors.** All homes and duplexes in Wisconsin are required to have CO detectors on every level including the basement, but not the attic or storage areas.
- **Have your furnace or wood-burning stove inspected annually** to make sure it is structurally and functionally sound and vents properly to the outside of your home.
- **Never run a gasoline or propane heater or a grill (gas or charcoal) inside your home or an unventilated garage.** Any heating system that burns fuel will produce carbon monoxide. Use a battery-powered detector where you have fuel burning devices but no electric outlets, such as in tents, cabins, RVs, and boats with enclosed cabins.
- **Never run a car in an enclosed space.** If a vehicle is running, you must have a door open to the outside.
- **Generators should be run a safe distance from the home.** Never run a generator in the home or garage, or right next to windows or doors.

Breathing carbon monoxide displaces the oxygen in the blood and can cause death within minutes at high levels. Symptoms of overexposure to carbon monoxide are often mistaken for the flu and include headaches, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath/chest pain, nausea/vomiting, and confusion. If you experience any of these symptoms, or your carbon monoxide detector sounds an alarm, head outside immediately for fresh air and call 911.

For more information on carbon monoxide poisoning, visit: [https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/air/co.htm](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/air/co.htm)
• The coldest temperature in the winter of 2018-19 was -49°F in the Village of Butternut (Ashland County) on February 1, 2019.
• Saxon (Iron County) had the most snow with 208.3 inches in the 2018-19 winter season.
• Greatest daily snow total for the 2018-19 season was recorded in Saxon (Iron County) at 16.5 inches.
• Wisconsin’s all-time, lowest temperature is -55°F on February 2 & 4, 1996, near Couderay (Sawyer County). Readings of -30°F or colder have been recorded in every month from November through April. Of course, brief readings in the 50's, 60's and 70's are possible during winter as well!
• Average annual snowfall ranges from 32 to 40 inches near the Illinois border to 135 to 168 inches in the Iron County snow-belt from Gurney to Hurley.