

# Gwinnett County

Department of Fire and Emergency Services



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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LAWRENCEVILLE – (Tuesday, January 5, 2010 at 2:36 p.m.) Gwinnett firefighters urge citizens to get prepared. With the temperatures getting colder and the potential for icy conditions on the rise, Gwinnett County Department of Fire and Emergency Services offers the following tips to staying safe and warm. The primary concern during the winter months is loss of heat, power, gas, and telephone service. There may be a shortage of essential supplies in the home such as food, water and medicines. Every household should have an emergency preparedness plan in place. Post important numbers by the telephone such as utility companies and emergency responders. The plan should include a winter weather kit that can be put together easily. The kit should include but not be limited to the following items:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Battery-powered NOAA weather radio and a portable AM/FM radio. *(These may be your only link to the outside world in the event of a disaster or major storm).*
- Extra food and water such as non-perishable/high energy foods and snacks that don't require refrigeration or cooking.
- Extra medications
- Extra baby items, especially if you have an infants or small children in the house.
- First-aid supplies
- Blankets, sleeping bags and extra clothing for warmth.
- Charge cell phones ahead of time, especially if you know that inclement weather is possible in your area.
- If you have a fireplace, gather and store extra firewood in a dry sheltered area of your home.

Install and maintain smoke detectors as well as carbon monoxide alarms. Develop a home escape plan and conduct fire drills with the entire family. The use of home heating devices such as wood stoves, fireplaces and space heaters can increase the potential for a fire to occur. Have all home heating appliances serviced annually by a certified technician. The fireplace provides warmth but can be dangerous if not properly used or maintained. Build a small fire in the fireplace, just enough to heat a room. Be sure to open the damper to vent the smoke. Extreme caution should be used, especially if the fireplace or wood stove has not been serviced. Kerosene heaters should be used in a well ventilated area. If you are using space heaters, remember to leave plenty of space around the device. Space heaters should be placed at least 3 to 4 feet away from anything combustible such as drapes, bedding and clothing. Use space heaters that are approved by an independent testing laboratory. All generators should be used outdoors in a well ventilated area. Place the generator a safe distance away from the home. Never use the generator inside a garage or basement. If you experience a loss of power, do not go outdoors in the dark to investigate. You could be electrocuted by live electrical lines that have fallen

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to the ground. Report downed power lines to the utility company and notify firefighters if you suspect they are live. All downed power lines should be considered live and appropriate measures should be taken to avoid contact.

There are also some things that you should know to be prepared if you are caught in your vehicle during extreme cold or a winter storm. Avoid being out on the roads if at all possible, especially during icy conditions. If you are on the roads, slow down and watch for other motorists:

- Plan your travel and check the weather conditions for your area or the area you are traveling to.
- Discuss your travel plans and routes with a family member or friend.
- Fully winterize your vehicle before the cold weather season starts.
- Carry a winter storm survival kit in your car. Items include: a blanket, sleeping bag, flashlight (*with extra batteries*), portable radio, first-aid kit, high calorie non-perishable food items (*foods that don't require refrigeration or cooking*), bottled water, road flares, extra clothing, tissue paper, a small bucket of sand, waterproof matches, windshield scraper and jumper cables.

If you have pets, or if you live on a farm, remember that animals should be moved to a sheltered area such as a barn during extremely cold temperatures. Pets should also be moved indoors if at all possible.

Be prepared for hypothermia and frostbite whenever exposed to the cold for any length of time. Know the signs and how to treat it properly. The best treatment is prevention. Avoid being outdoors during extremely cold temperatures or during a winter storm. If you are outside, limit your time in the cold and wear layers of loose-fitting light weight clothing. Try as much as possible to stay dry.

#### **HYPOTHERMIA:**

The warning signs of hypothermia are uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. To treat a person for hypothermia, remember to warm the body slowly. Replace wet clothing with dry warm-clothing. Wrap the person with warm blankets and provide a warm soup broth (avoid alcohol, coffee or any other hot beverage).

#### **FROSTBITE:**

Frostbite is damage to body tissue that is caused by the tissue being frozen. Frostbite causes a loss of sensation (feeling) and a white or pale appearance to extremities such as fingers, toes, earlobes, and the tip of the nose. If signs of frostbite are observed seek medical attention immediately. Warm the body slowly by wrapping with warm blankets. Follow the same treatment measures for hypothermia and only give warm soup broth if the person is conscious, alert, and has no breathing difficulties.