

Maryland State Firemen's Association

Fire Prevention and Life Safety Committee

TIP Sheet: WINTER SAFETY



*From chilling temperatures to slippery sidewalks,
winter is a season that brings unique safety concerns.*

Keep your family cozy and safe this winter by remembering a few important tips.

Staying Safe at Home this Winter

Winter comes with a few hazards for homeowners, but there are plenty of things you can do to protect your property and your family. Keep these tips in mind.

Request a Home Heating Inspection: The fact that your central heating unit, space heater, or fireplace was working properly at the end of last season does not mean it's ready for this winter. Before frigid temperatures set in, hire a professional to conduct a safety inspection of your heating units, as well as your fireplace's flue and chimney. If any potential risks are found, act immediately to remedy them. If you'll be using space heaters, make sure your rooms have proper ventilation and that the units are not placed near anything flammable. Using unsafe heating systems can result in fire, injuries, or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Be Aware of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless vapor that is sometimes produced by gas furnaces and space heaters. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include nausea, dizziness, severe headache, confusion, and unconsciousness. If you notice these symptoms in yourself or a family member, go to the emergency room right away. If you have a central gas heater, use gas-powered space heaters, or have a fireplace, install carbon monoxide detectors in your home.

Clear Snow and Remove Ice: According to the CDC, falls are the number one cause of injuries to adults. Many of these falls happen when sidewalks, driveways, and walkways are covered in snow and ice. Make sure any of these surfaces around your home are shoveled regularly and free from debris.

Take Regular Breaks: Taking breaks at regular intervals is a good idea when you are enjoying the great outdoors in the winter. Go inside to warm up and get a snack and something to drink. A safer choice may be not to push yourself if you are already tired.

Protect Your Plumbing: When temperatures dip below freezing, it's important to take steps to prevent ruptured plumbing. To prevent burst pipes, leave water dripping slightly so that water is constantly running through them to reduce the chances of freezing. Additionally, open the cabinets in which indoor pipes are housed so they are exposed to the warmest temperatures in your home. Outdoor pipes should be wrapped with sufficient insulation to reduce exposure to the elements.

Prepare for Winter Storms: If you live in an area prone to winter storms, it's important to plan for them early in the season. Stock up on the following supplies:

- Battery-powered radio
- Flashlights and lanterns, with spare batteries
- Drinking water 1 gallon per family member per day
- Non-perishable food that doesn't require cooking
- Baby food and formula, if needed
- Pet food, if needed
- Prescription medications
- First aid kit
- Dry clothing/shoes for each family member

Know the Signs of Hypothermia: According to the National Institute of Health, anyone who spends extended periods outside in cold winter temperatures is at risk for hypothermia. Hypothermia can happen when your body temperature drops from its usual 98.6 degrees. It is a medical emergency if a person's temperature is 95 degrees or less. In addition to the lowered temperature, someone experiencing hypothermia may have the following symptoms:

- Confusion
- Clumsiness and stumbling
- Dizziness and drowsiness
- Apathetic mental state
- Shivering
- Slurred speech
- Weak pulse and slow breathing