**Winter Weather Awareness**

When winter weather threatens, those of us in Missouri tend to flock to the store to stock up on de-icer and snow shovels – perhaps to discover that they are sold out. The time to prepare for winter weather is before winter weather strikes!

In Missouri a major winter storm can last for several days and be accompanied by high winds, freezing rain or sleet, heavy snowfall and cold temperatures. The aftermath of a winter storm can have an impact on a community or region for days, weeks or even months. People can become trapped at home or in a car, without utilities or other assistance. Attempting to walk for help in a winter storm can be a deadly decision. Hypothermia and frostbite can lead to loss of fingers and toes or cause permanent kidney, pancreas and liver injury and even death.

According to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, there were 26 cold-weather related deaths during each of the last several winter seasons. So taking winter storms serious can truly be a matter of life or death.

To prepare for winter storms, create a family emergency plan and an emergency supply kit. Your plan should consider how you will remove snow and ice. Have your tools (snow shovels, snow blower) and ice melting products ready. Stock your supply kit with appropriate winter outdoor clothing including coat, mittens, hat and water-resistant boots for each family member. Acquire extra blankets and warm clothing in the event of power outages. And stock up on extra water and food that doesn’t require cooking if there are power outages.

Don’t forget to get your car ready as well. When winter weather threatens keep the gas tank full for emergency use and to keep the fuel line from freezing. Check the antifreeze, oil and fluid levels, the heating system, and get snow tires or make sure the all-weather tires have plenty of tread. And prepare a winter car kit with a starter cables, shovel, sand or shingles for traction, extra blankets, and energy snacks. You may also want to include a fluorescent orange cloth or safety flares to alert other drivers that you need help if you have car trouble.

The Missouri Department of Transportation has a helpful “Road Conditions Traveler Map” available on their website at [http://www.modot.mo.gov/](http://www.modot.mo.gov/) This is a good way to stay alerted to driving conditions when heading out on a trip.

Finally, consider securing an alternate fuel source for your home should you lose power, such as firewood or a generator. Make sure your fireplace functions properly. If you have a generator, make sure you have fuel, that your generator functions properly, and you know how to operate it safely.

There’s lots of good information out there, including

- SEMA (Missouri’s State Emergency Management Agency)
- Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services “Ready in 3” program
- Missouri Department of Transportation
- The National Weather Service
- FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

For links to all kinds of help preparing for winter, go to [http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/seasons/winter.aspx](http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/seasons/winter.aspx)