

Winter's Not Over Yet

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It's been just about one year since Northern Colorado suffered its second worst winter storm ever. Just because we have had warm weather in the past week doesn't mean that a crippling winter storm can't hit. Preparation is the key to difference between disaster and a comfortable evening in front of the fireplace.

Blizzards are the most dangerous of winter storms. They produce high winds and heavy snow throughout much of the United States from December to March. They are most common in the northern Great Plains states -- South Dakota is sometimes called "the Blizzard State" -- but Colorado gets its fair share of these storms.

Many blizzard-related deaths involve people who die of hypothermia in their cars, on the street or in wilderness areas. Sadly, most of these deaths could have been avoided with proper preparation. Blizzards also cause countless cases of frostbite, as well as damage to unsupported structures and homes.

If you live in a snow-prone area, pay close attention to weather forecasts and listen for watches and warnings like these:

WINTER STORM WATCH: Severe winter conditions, such as heavy snow or ice, are possible within the next day or two. Prepare now!

WINTER STORM WARNING: Severe winter conditions have begun or are about to begin in your area. Seek shelter!

BLIZZARD WARNING: Snow and strong winds will combine to produce a blinding snow (near zero visibility), deep drifts, and life-threatening wind chill. Seek refuge immediately!

WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY: Winter weather conditions are expected and may be hazardous, especially for motorists.

If you're in your home or a building:

- Stay inside.
- When using alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove, or space heater, use fire safeguards and properly ventilate. A BBQ grill is not intended to be operated inside and will produce carbon monoxide. Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your house cooler than normal. Temporarily shut off heat to less-used rooms.
- If using kerosene heaters, maintain ventilation to avoid buildup of toxic fumes. Keep heaters at least three feet from flammable objects. Refuel kerosene heaters outside.

If there's no heat:

- Close off unneeded rooms.
- Stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors.
- Cover windows at night.
- Stay nourished:
 - Eat food to provide your body with energy so it can produce its own heat.
 - Keep your body replenished with fluids to prevent dehydration.

Remember, these storms can cause loss of electricity, heat, and telephone service and can trap you in your home for a few days. It's important to have ample supplies on hand in your home:

- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- Battery-powered NOAA weather radio and portable radio to receive emergency information. These may be your only links to the outside.
- Extra food and bottled water. High-energy food, such as dried fruit or candy, and canned food requiring no cooking or refrigeration is best.
- Manual can opener.
- Extra medicine and baby items.
- First-aid supplies.
- Heating fuel. Fuel carriers may not reach you for days after a severe winter storm.
- Back-up heating source, such as a fireplace, wood stove, space heater, etc.
- Fire extinguisher and smoke detector.

Being stuck or stranded in your car in a winter storm can become a question of survival. It's serious business and you and your vehicle must be prepared.

- Stay in the vehicle. Do not attempt to walk in a blizzard. Disorientation comes quickly in blowing and drifting snow. Being lost in open country during a blizzard is extremely dangerous. You are more likely to be found in your vehicle and you will be sheltered there.
- Avoid overexertion and exposure. Exertions from attempting to push your stuck vehicle, shoveling heavy drifts, and performing other difficult tasks during strong winds, blinding snow, and the bitter cold of a blizzard may cause a heart attack...even for persons in apparently good physical condition.
- Be aware of carbon monoxide. Burn candles and run the engine and heater sparingly, and only with a down-wind window slightly open for ventilation. Freezing rain, wet snow, and wind-driven snow can completely seal the passenger compartment of your vehicle. Make sure that snow has not blocked the exhaust pipe.
- Insulate. Blankets, extra clothing, floor mats, and even newspapers and road maps can be used for extra warmth.
- Exercise by clapping your hands and moving your arms and legs from time to time, and do not stay in one position for long. Don't overdo it. Exercise warms you but also increases body heat loss.
- Take turns keeping watch. If more than one person is in the vehicle, don't all sleep at the same time. If alone, stay awake as long as possible. Turn on the interior light at night to make your vehicle more visible to rescue and work crews.

If you are concerned about your situation do not hesitate to call 911 especially if you are stuck in a car or outside.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Mountain View Property Inspections. If you would like to know more about your home go to **WWW.MVPinspection.com** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@comcast.net