

# EMERGENCY SURVIVAL GUIDE

## Blizzards/Heavy Snow

### BLIZZARD SURVIVAL

During a blizzard (synonymous with *severe winter storm* for our purposes here) there are several things you can do to reduce your personal risk. First and foremost, you should stay indoors and out of the cold as much as possible. If you must go out into the storm, avoid heavy physical exertion such as shoveling snow, pushing vehicles, or trying to walk long distances through deep snow. The strain from the exertion coupled with the extreme cold can cause a heart attack. In addition, heavy perspiration during extreme cold can lead to chill and hypothermia.

#### **At home and at work:**

The primary concerns here are the potential loss of heat, electrical power, telephone service, and a shortage of supplies should the blizzard last for more than a day or two. You can prepare beforehand by storing the following supplies:

- Flashlight and batteries
  - Make sure the batteries are fresh and store extras.
  - Use them sparingly to conserve battery power.
- Battery-powered AM-FM radio or NOAA Weather Radio
  - This may be your only link to the outside for a while.
  - The more information you have about the storm, the easier it is to decide what needs to be done.
- Extra food and water
  - Safe drinking water is a primary concern.
  - Store high-energy foods, such as dried fruit or candy.
  - Non-perishable foods which require no cooking are best.
- Extra medicine and baby items
- First Aid supplies
- Heating fuel
  - Fuel carriers may not reach you for several days after a blizzard.
  - Plenty of dry wood and kindling for the fireplace.
  - Matches, lighters, or some other type of fire source.
- Emergency heating source
  - Such as a fireplace, wood stove, space heater, etc.
  - Learn to use these devices *safely* **before** you need them.
    - Many deaths occur each year from asphyxiation due to improper ventilation or other misuse of devices intended for emergency heating.
- Fire extinguisher and smoke detector
  - Test these units regularly to ensure they are working properly.

**During the storm:**

- If you are inside but have no heat, close off unneeded rooms. Stuff towels or rags in the cracks under the doors. Cover the windows at night.
- Eat and drink. Food provides the body with energy for producing its own heat. Keep the body replenished with fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Wear layers of loose-fitting, light-weight, warm clothing. Remove layers to avoid overheating, perspiration, and subsequent chill. Sleep with a wool hat and numerous thin blankets (instead of one heavy one).

**If you have to go out:**

Dress to fit the weather. As mentioned above, it is better to wear several thin layers than one thick one. More layers trap air, and trapped air insulates. Add or remove layers to adjust to changes in conditions. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent, and hooded. Always wear a hat. Half of your body heat loss can be from your head. Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from extreme cold. Mittens, snug at the wrists, are better than gloves. Try to stay dry.

Travel only during the daylight and on major roads. Do not travel alone. Let someone know your schedule and destination.

**If you are caught outside in a winter storm:**

Find shelter and try to stay dry. Cover all exposed parts of your body from the wind.

**If you are caught in a winter storm inside a vehicle:**

Stay in your vehicle. Disorientation occurs quickly in wind-driven snow and cold. Run the motor about 10 minutes each hour for heat and open the window a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked.

Do not burn anything for heat inside the vehicle. Open fires burn oxygen and give off carbon dioxide which can quickly cause asphyxiation in a closed vehicle.

**Make yourself visible to rescuers.** Turn on the dome light at night when running the engine. Tie a colored cloth (preferably red) to your antenna or door. Raise the hood to indicate trouble after the snow has stopped falling. *Only leave the vehicle for help if help is in sight*

Your car should also have the following supplies:

Plan your travel and check the latest weather reports to avoid the storm!

· Fully check and winterize your vehicle before the winter season begins.

## **CARRY A WINTER STORM SURVIVAL KIT FOR YOUR CAR**

- Blankets/sleeping bags
- flashlight with extra batteries
- first-aid kit;
- knife
- high-calorie, non-perishable food;
- extra clothing to keep dry;
- a large empty can and plastic cover with tissues and paper towels for sanitary purposes
- a smaller can and water-proof matches to melt snow for drinking water
- sack of sand (or cat litter);
- shovel; windshield scraper and brush;
- tool kit;
- tow rope
- booster cables
- Canned fruits or nuts and a can opener
- Road maps
- Bottled water
- An emergency supply of any medication needed regularly
- Extra warm clothes (mittens, overshoes, and ski caps)
- Flares
- Transistor radio with spare battery

### **TIPS FOR YOUR CAR**

Keep your gas tank over half full for added safety. In extremely cold climates consider installing an engine and/or battery heater.

- Anti-freeze protection should be at least -25 degrees (50/50 mix 35 degrees).
- Occasionally pour in a can of fuel line anti-freeze in very cold weather.
- On cold, windy nights, park with the front of the car away from the wind.
- On manual transmission cars, depress the clutch before engaging the starter so it doesn't have to turn the transmission gears which are immersed in 90W gear oil.
- Door lock defroster is useless locked inside the car. Keep it in the house, purse, pockets or desk.
- Tires deflate as temperature decreases one pound of pressure for every 10 degrees of temperature drop.
- A 75 watt light bulb under the hood near the battery can help keep the chill off of the battery; this could help a cold start.

**Try not to travel alone.**

**Let someone know your timetable and primary and alternate routes**

## Disaster Related Utility Problems

Electricity:  
Niagara Mohawk  
1-800-642-4272

In the event of an accident or disaster you may lose the service of one or more of your utilities without warning. Or, you may want to shut them off yourself should there be a break or movement in one of the lines. Below is a brief discussion of the basics you should know about your utilities. But first of all, you will need to know who is responsible for the various utilities you use so you can contact the proper agency for help. Having this information ahead of time will save time during an actual emergency, and will allow you to contact the proper agency without tying up other emergency phone lines and agencies unnecessarily. If you are in doubt about your utility service provider, check your recent utility bills for specific information.

At some point, perhaps due to a severe storm or other event, you may find it necessary to turn off the electricity to your home. Rule number one is that electricity and water don't mix. If your home is flooding, or if you see sparks or downed wires, you should get out of your house immediately and call for help. In other situations, where there is no immediate threat to your safety, and you can get to your circuit breaker box without walking through water, you can turn the power off yourself. If you would have to stand in water to do so, leave the house and notify the local power company rather than trying to shut the power off yourself. Consider that if the emergency is widespread, extending beyond your home, you may not be able to get through to the power company immediately due to the volume of calls during the emergency. You should familiarize yourself with the location of your circuit breaker box ahead of time and mark the master power switch so you can immediately identify which one to throw during an emergency to stop all power coming into your house.

### **Tips on how to shut the power off:**

If you have a circuit breaker box...

Stand on a dry spot.

Use a dry wooden stick or pole to open the door.

Use the stick to push the MAIN breaker switch to OFF.

Use the stick to turn all remaining breaker switches to OFF.

If you have a fuse box...

Stand on a dry spot.

If your fuse box has a handle on the side, use a dry wooden stick or pole to pull the handle to the OFF position.

Use the stick to open the fuse box door.

Carefully remove the MAIN fuse.

Remove all remaining circuit fuses.

Use the stick whenever possible to remove the fuses, depending on the type you have.

When you return home after the disaster, have a professional inspect and restore the electricity.

**Portable generators can be a big help if you are without power, but remember:**

Connect appliances one at a time to the generator.

Never hook a generator directly to your household wiring yourself. Only a qualified electrician can do this safely.

Use generators outdoors only. They give off carbon monoxide fumes.

Avoid using extension cords with generators. If you must use them, check them often to make sure they have not become hot.

**If you have no heat:**

- Call National Fuel at 1-800-444-3130
- Do not use camping appliances to heat!
- You can use alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove, or space heater, but be sure to follow manufacturer recommended safeguards, and always assure proper ventilation.
- Don't burn trash.

**Hyper-insulate your home**

- Close off unneeded rooms.
- Stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors.
- Cover windows at night.
- Eat and drink if possible.
- Fluids prevent dehydration, which can occur quickly.
- Wear layers of loose fitting, light-weight, warm clothing.
- Remove layers to avoid overheating, perspiration, and subsequent chill.

## **Non-Emergency Advice**

Get general information from a local emergency broadcast station  
Call the non-emergency phone number 851-4004

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### **If you have broken water lines, tree limbs on power lines, or broken tree limbs.**

#### **If the problem is broken water pipes:**

##### **If you have any structural damage:**

Shut off the water if you know how to do this.

Avoid going into the affected area.

If you smell gas evacuate the building and do not go back for any reason.

##### **If the water HAS NOT caused structural damage:**

Call a plumber (listings in Yellow Pages).

You can purchase a sump pump from a discount outlet or hardware store, and might be able to rent one through a local rental company

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### **Broken tree limbs on power lines**

Call Niagara Mohawk 1-800-642-4272

If the power lines are laying on, or against your house - especially if sparking is occurring - evacuate your house immediately.

Stay in the house if you are not in immediate danger.

Do not go near, or come in contact with downed power lines. Let your power company deal with the problem.

### **If you are trapped outdoors but not in a vehicle**

- If you are calling on a cell phone, find shelter (for everyone) as quickly as possible, identify an obvious landmark nearby, and report your location.
- Try to stay dry.
- Cover all exposed parts of the body.

### **If you cannot find shelter**

- Do not eat snow directly. Melt it first. Frozen snow will lower your body temperature.
- Exercise lightly and regularly to keep your circulation active.

### **If you are stuck in a house**

- Stay in your home.
- Drive only in an emergency.
- If there has been a power outage call Niagara Mohawk at 1-800-642-4272

## **Trapped in a motor vehicle**

- Stay in your vehicle. Disorientation occurs quickly in wind driven snow and cold. People have been lost within a hundred feet of their vehicle.
- Run the motor about ten minutes each half-hour for heat, but:
  - Open the window a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
  - Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked!
- Make yourself visible to rescuers
  - Turning on the dome light at night when running the engine.
  - Tying a colored cloth to your antenna or door.
  - Raising the hood (after snow stops falling) indicating trouble.
- Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers, and toes to keep blood circulating and keep yourself warm.

## **IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

**911**                    **FOR AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE**  
**1-800-444-3130** **National Fuel**  
**1-800-642-4272** **Niagara Mohawk**  
**851-4004**            **Non-emergency**