



# Are You Prepared?

## Winter Storms & Extreme Cold - Vehicle Preparedness

Courtesy of Huckaby & Associates

While the amount of danger from winter weather varies across the country, nearly all Americans, regardless of where they live, are likely to face some type of severe winter weather at some point in their lives. Winter storms can range from a moderate snow over a few hours to a blizzard with blinding, wind-driven snow that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures and sometimes by strong winds, ice, sleet and freezing rain.

A primary concern during winter storms and extreme cold is commuting safely. Most businesses, events and activities will only close down during the worst storms or extreme temperatures during winter. Because of this, it's important that vehicles are properly prepared for winter conditions to make commuting in these conditions as safe as possible.

### Winterize Your Vehicle

Check or have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- **Antifreeze levels**—ensure they are sufficient to avoid freezing.
- **Battery and ignition system** should be in top condition, and battery terminals should be clean.
- **Brakes**—check for wear and fluid levels.
- **Exhaust system**—check for leaks and crimped pipes, and repair or replace as necessary. Carbon monoxide is deadly and usually gives no warning.



- **Fuel and air filters**—replace filters and keep water out of the system by using additives and maintaining a full tank of gas. A full tank will keep the fuel line from freezing.
- **Heater and defroster**—ensure they work properly.
- **Lights and flashing hazard lights**—check for serviceability.
- **Oil**—check for level and weight. Heavier oils congeal at low temperatures and do not lubricate as well.
- **Thermostat**—ensure it works properly.
- **Windshield wiper equipment**—repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- **Install good winter tires**—make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require that to drive on their roads, vehicles must be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.

Update the emergency kit in your vehicle with the following:

- A shovel
- Windshield scraper and small broom
- Flashlight
- Battery-powered radio
- Extra batteries
- Water
- Non-perishable snack food
- Matches
- Extra hats, socks and mittens
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- Blanket(s)
- Tow chain or rope
- Road salt and sand

### Know the Terms

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify winter storm hazards:

- **Freezing rain** – Rain that freezes when it hits the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads, walkways, trees and power lines.
- **Sleet** – Rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes moisture on roads to freeze and become slippery.
- **Winter weather advisory** – Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. When caution is used, these situations should not be life-threatening.
- **Winter storm watch** – A winter storm is possible in your area. Tune in to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather Radio, commercial radio or local television for more information.
- **Winter storm warning** – A winter storm is occurring or will soon occur in your area.
- **Blizzard warning** – Sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 miles per hour or greater and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.
- **Frost/freeze warning** – Below-freezing temperatures are expected.

- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- Fluorescent distress flag

### **If You Are Stranded in a Vehicle**

If a blizzard traps you in the car:

- Pull off the highway. Turn on the hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.
- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful—distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater for about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. This will protect you from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Exercise to maintain your body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids to avoid dehydration, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs—the use of lights, heat and radio—with supply.
- Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.
- If stranded in a remote area, stomp large block letters in an open area spelling out HELP or SOS and line with rocks or tree limbs to attract the attention of rescue personnel who may be surveying the area by air.
- Leave the car and proceed on foot—if necessary—once the blizzard passes.

In addition to insuring your home, Huckaby & Associates is committed to helping you and your loved ones stay safe when disaster strikes. If you would like more information on developing a family emergency plan or building a disaster supply kit, please contact us at (803) 772-3773 or [www.huckabyandassociates.com](http://www.huckabyandassociates.com) today.