



Stay safe as winter weather hits

Despite a mild start and less snow than usual, it seems as though winter may have finally caught up to us. The coldest season comes with a number of potential safety hazards.

- Covering your coughs and sneezes isn't just for kids. Good habits can help keep you and the people around you healthy! If you don't have a tissue, remember to cough and sneeze into your sleeve to stop the spread of germs. It's flu season, so don't forget to wash your hands often with soap and water to prevent the spread of illness.
- Travel can be dangerous in bad weather, so make sure you pay attention to the forecast and know when snow or ice could impact your plans. Plan ahead in case you get stranded and keep supplies you would need to stay warm and get your vehicle moving.
- Wind chill is the temperature your body feels from both the air temperature and wind speed. As wind increases, it carries heat away from your body much more quickly, causing skin temperature to drop. Frostbite is loss of feeling and color to skin due to cold weather exposure. Hypothermia can occur when a person is exposed to extremely cold temperatures, causing their body temperature to fall below 95 degrees. If you must go outside, be sure to dress warm and cover your hands and face.
- Many fires are caused by heat sources that malfunctioned or were used improperly. Use fireplaces, wood stoves or other combustion heaters with care, and only if they are properly vented. Have your heating system serviced by a qualified technician every year, and never use a fireplace that hasn't been recently inspected. Never use an electric generator indoors, and do not place a space heater within 3 feet of anything that may catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding. Never cover your space heater, and do not use it if the cord shows any damage.
- Extreme cold could cause water pipes in your home to freeze or rupture. When very cold temperatures are expected, leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously. Keep the indoor temperature warm by covering windows and closing doors. Improve the circulation of heated air near pipes by opening cabinet doors beneath the kitchen sink. If your pipes freeze, thaw them slowly with an electric hair dryer.
- Radon is a cancer-causing, radioactive gas that can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings, especially during winter when your windows stay shut. You can't see, smell, or taste it, but an elevated radon level in your home could affect your family's health. Exposure to radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, and the No. 1 cause among nonsmokers.