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PEMA URGES WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

HARRISBURG – As temperatures drop and daylight dwindles, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency is urging people to prepare for winter weather before it strikes.

Downed power lines, ice storms, frozen water pipes and blizzards can turn peaceful settings into dangerous situations at home and on the road, said PEMA Director Robert P.

French.

“As residents in Erie have already witnessed, winter storms can develop quickly and bring snow and ice with little advanced warning,” he said. “It is important that all Pennsylvanians take the time to prepare while the weather is relatively calm.

“Motorists, in particular, should pay attention to road conditions, alter travel plans as needed and pack a winter storm kit in their vehicle. Safe travel means preparing for winter driving, staying in touch with family and loved ones, and avoiding unnecessary risks,” French said.

If at home during a winter storm, French said people should be prepared with drinking water, a first-aid kit, canned/non-perishable food, a non-electric can opener, battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries that are easily-accessible. And, make sure there is an extra supply of any needed prescription or over-the-counter medicines, if necessary.

Also, know how public warnings are issued on radio and television and learn what each kind of broadcast weather alert means. For example:

- “Winter weather advisory” means weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists;
- “Winter storm watch” means people should be alert because a storm is likely;
- “Winter storm warning” means a storm is in, or entering, the area; and

- “Blizzard warning” means snow and strong winds will produce near-zero visibility, deep drifts and life-threatening wind chill -- seek refuge immediately.

Other tips:

Keeping Warm at Home

- Dress in several layers of loosely fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. Outer garments, like hats, mittens, scarves, and boots, should be tightly woven and water-repellent;
- Properly insulate walls and attics. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows. Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside. Protect pipes by wrapping them in insulation and let faucets drip to prevent freezing;
- Fireplace and wood stove chimneys should be inspected annually to make sure the residue left by burning wood has not accumulated;
- Consider buying emergency heating equipment, such as a wood- or coal-burning stove or kerosene heater, as a backup;
- Keep kerosene and propane heaters at least three feet away from combustible substances, like furniture, blankets and rugs. Never substitute one type of fuel for another; and
- Run generators outside only. Open windows and fans do not provide enough ventilation to prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide.

Road Safety

- Check road conditions before departing (PennDOT’s Web site: www.dot.state.pa.us ...and click on Road Conditions);
- Avoid driving during a winter storm or blizzard warning. If travel is necessary, do it in daylight and don’t travel alone;
- Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair;
- Make sure batteries, ignition systems, thermostats, lights, flashers, exhausts, heaters, brakes, defrosters and tires of vehicles are working. Check antifreeze, windshield washer fluid and oil levels;
- Pack a shovel, ice scraper, flashlight, battery-powered radio, extra batteries, water, snacks, hats and mittens, blankets, tow chains or ropes, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and a fluorescent distress flag in vehicles;
- Drive only at speeds dictated by conditions and increase distances between vehicles; and
- Share travel schedules and routes and stay on main roads. Carry a cell phone.

Motorists within Pennsylvania may call PennDOT’s 24-hour, toll-free Road Condition

Hotline at 1-888-783-6783 for interstate conditions. Out-of-state motorists can call 717-783-5186.

In the event of an emergency, call 911. For additional emergency preparedness and winter safety information, visit www.pema.state.pa.us.