

Your Guide to Outdoor Winter Safety

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Minnesota winters can bring freezing temperatures and unpredictable weather changes. Being prepared is always the best way to remain safe in any situation the weather might bring.

Plan Ahead Using These Tips from Minnesota Homeland Security and the American Red Cross

Safe Behavior

- Never walk on ice less than four inches thick. Don't snowmobile on less than five inches or drive your car on less than eight inches of new, clear ice.
- Warn your children to stay away from ice-covered ponds and streams.
- Dress warmly in loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent and natural wool, if possible.
- Wear a hat. More than half of body heat is lost through the top of the head.
- Wear mittens that are snug at the wrist. Mittens offer better protection than gloves which allow your fingers to cool much faster.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf to help protect lungs from cold air.
- Watch for frostbite and hypothermia. If such symptoms are detected, get medical attention immediately. The symptoms of cold-weather exposure might include: *Hypothermia*-Confusion, dizziness, exhaustion and severe shivering. *Frostbite*-Gray, white or yellow skin discoloration, numbness, waxy feeling skin.
- Do not rub an affected part with snow or ice. This does not help the condition and, in fact, will make it worse. The best treatment for frostbite is re-warming the affected tissue.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration can be a severe problem.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages, especially when snowmobiling. Alcohol causes the body to lose heat more rapidly, even though one may feel warmer after drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather even without physical exertion puts an extra strain on the heart. If you add the strain of heavy physical activity, such as shoveling snow, pushing an automobile or even walking too fast or too far, you risk damaging your body.
- Keep yourself and your clothes dry. Change wet socks and all other wet clothing as quickly as possible to prevent loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses its insulation value and transmits heat rapidly.
- If paralyzed persons or infants must go outside in severe weather, they should be checked frequently for signs of frostbite.
- Attempt to keep your feet as dry as possible. Wear wool socks.

Winter Survival Kits for Your Vehicle- Assemble winter survival kits for all of your vehicles. Keep them where they will be readily accessible. They should include:

- Coffee can, candle stubs and matches used to melt snow for drinking water

- Metal or plastic cup
- Red bandana and a plastic whistle for alerting rescuers
- Pencil and paper
- 1st Aid kit, including essential medications
- Plastic flashlight with spare batteries
- Two large plastic garbage bags, safety pins (bags are for covering feet, safety pins keep bags together)
- Snack foods for energy
- Gloves, blankets, sleeping bag, jumper cables, shovel, sand, and reflectors.
- Whenever traveling in winter, call ahead to your destination before you intend to leave, your travel route, and your expected time of arrival.
- If you become stranded, never leave your vehicle.
- Consider carrying a cell phone.

Pet Safety

- Check your car before starting it, cats often choose to sleep under the hoods of cars where it is warmer.
- Never let your dog off the leash on snow or ice, especially during a snowstorm. Dogs frequently lose their scent in snow and ice and can easily become lost.
- Thoroughly wipe off your dog's legs and stomach when they come in from the outdoors. Salt, antifreeze or other chemicals can hurt your dog while licking their paws.
- If you suspect your dog or cat has been poisoned by outdoor chemicals, call The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-4ANI-HELP).
- Never leave your dog or cat alone in a car during the cold weather. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold.