

Steps you can take to protect yourself and your family

The “Winter Storm Warning” classification by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency means: “Take action, the storm is in or entering the area.”

MEMA recommends that residents take the following steps to protect themselves in the case of an approaching storm:

- Trim dead tree branches and limbs close to your home. Ice, snow and wind can combine to snap limbs that can take down power lines or damage your home.
- Clean gutters. Melting snow and ice can build up if gutters are clogged with debris. When thawing begins, the water can back up under your roof and eaves causing damage to walls and ceilings. Check your homeowner's insurance policy to ensure adequate coverage.
- Have your chimney flue checked for any buildup of creosote and cleaned if necessary to lessen the risk of fire. Have sufficient heating fuel, as regular sources may be cut off. Have the option of emergency heating equipment and fuel (a gas fireplace, wood burning stove or fireplace) so you can safely keep at least one room livable. Be sure the room is well ventilated.
- Ensure that your Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors are working correctly and have fresh batteries. Check your outside fuel exhaust vents, making sure that they are not obstructed by snow or ice. Never use cooking equipment intended for outside use indoors as a heat source or cooking device.
- Make sure your home is properly insulated. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows to keep cold air out.
- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside to provide insulation.
- To keep pipes from freezing, wrap them in insulation or layers of newspapers, covering the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture. Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing.
- Know how to safely shut off gas, electric power and water valves.
- If your water supply could be affected by a power outage (a well-water pump system), be prepared to fill your bathtub and spare containers with water. Water in the bathtub should be used for sanitation purposes only, not as drinking water. Pouring a pail of water from the tub directly into the bowl can flush a toilet.
- If pipes freeze, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they are most exposed to the cold. A hand-held hair dryer, used with caution, also works well.
- If electric power is lost, do not open the refrigerator or freezer door. Food can stay cold in a full refrigerator for up to 24 hours, and in a well-packed freezer for 48 hours (24 hours if it is half-packed). If you have medication that requires refrigeration, check with your pharmacist for guidance on proper storage during an extended outage.
- Review the process for manually operating your electric garage door.
- Ensure your Winter Emergency Supply Kit is stocked with supplies to enable you to survive on your own for at least three to five days. There should be a first-aid kit, essential prescription medicines, non-perishable foods (those that require no refrigeration such as canned goods, dried fruits and nuts), a manual can opener, water (one gallon per person, per day), flashlights and extra batteries along with a portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio, baby-care or pet supplies items, extra blankets, sleeping bags and a fire extinguisher.
- Ensure that your Winter Emergency Car Kit is well stocked to keep you and your vehicle safe.
- Be a Good Neighbor. Check with elderly or relatives and neighbors who might need additional assistance to ensure they have made adequate preparations.

