

Preparing for the Cold and for Weather Emergencies

There are several important ways you can prepare for winter emergencies BEFORE the cold weather hits:

- 1. Have your heating system checked annually for possible problems.** If your furnace breaks down during a cold spell, temperatures in your home could plummet in a matter of hours. Keep in mind that during peak breakdown periods, generally between December and February, it may be days before repairs can be made.
- 2. Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors near bedrooms and on all floors of your home or apartment - MAKE SURE THEY'RE WORKING.** Test them monthly and change their batteries at least once a year. In the event of a gas leak, faulty heater or winter fire, they could save your life!
- 3. Make sure you have plenty of warm blankets and working flashlights on hand** in case of a winter power outage that could leave you without heat or electricity.
- 4. Keep an emergency supply of canned goods and necessities in your home.** You should always be prepared in the event you can't leave your home.
- 5. Have a battery-powered portable radio available.** This will allow you to obtain weather reports and other emergency news in the event of a power outage. In case power lines are disabled, it is also advisable to have a cell phone for emergency use.
- 6. Stock up on medications you may need** and if you have a home health care service, plan ahead with the agency to establish emergency procedures.
- 7. Pre-arrange for someone to check on you** in the event of a weather emergency.

Information and Referral



**POLICE/AMBULANCE/FIRE
EMERGENCIES.....9-1-1**

**ELDER HELPLINE (CRISIS SERVICES):
Treasure Coast (toll-free).....2-1-1 or
.....(866) 882-2991
Outside Treasure Coast (561) 383-1111**

**FLORIDA ABUSE HOTLINE:
.....(800) 962-2873**

**ALZHEIMER'S 24-HOUR CRISISLINE:
.....(800) 394-1771**

**SENIOR RESOURCE ASSOCIATION:
.....(772) 569-0760**

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY HEALTH DEPT.:
.....(772) 794-7400**

**THE SOURCE (COLD NIGHT SHELTER):
.....(772) 564-0202**

Winter Safety Tips For Seniors

This guide is intended to review safety tips, offer suggestions and provide resources that may provide helpful services to the residents of Indian River County.



**Indian River County
Department of Emergency Services
Emergency Management Division
4225 43rd Avenue
Vero Beach, FL 32967
(772) 567-2154
www.irces.com**

Winter in Florida is usually mild, beautiful and clear. We usually don't have regular bouts with severe cold. Occasionally a severe cold front or two comes through and our vulnerable populations must be prepared to deal with the cold. The elderly and frail are especially vulnerable to winter hazards such as exposure to cold or inadequate heating.

Guarding Against Hypothermia

Hypothermia is classified as a drop in body temperature below 96 degrees and can be extremely dangerous if not detected early. Medical experts believe certain conditions such as stroke, severe arthritis and Parkinson's disease can block the body's response to cold, as can some medications. This makes seniors particularly susceptible to accidental hypothermia.

What Are the Warning Signs of Hypothermia?

- Uncontrollable shivering
- Numbness
- Confusion, disorientation, drowsiness
- Stiff muscles
- Slurred speech
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Slow, irregular heartbeat
- Weak pulse
- Stumbling and loss of coordination

Remember, even mildly cool temperatures of 60-65 degrees can cause a dangerous drop in internal body temperature, which can be deadly if not treated promptly and properly.

To protect against the potentially devastating consequences of hypothermia, follow these simple guidelines:

- Try to limit your time outdoors, especially if you are in a high-risk group.
- If you are forced to be outside during cold weather, wear warm, layered clothing made of natural fibers.
- You should wear a hat, warm socks and gloves to reduce heat loss.
- Stay indoors on windy days. Even if the temperature appears to be moderate, wind chill can substantially increase your risk of hypothermia.
- When indoors, keep your thermostat set at a comfortable level. Wear warm clothing, and use enough blankets at night to keep warm while sleeping.
- Choose hot, nourishing meals and drink warm beverages to keep your body temperature up.

If you suspect someone may be suffering from hypothermia, keep the person dry and warm with blankets. DO NOT rub limbs to warm them. You should also encourage them to drink hot beverages that are free of caffeine or alcohol. Above all, seek medical attention immediately.



Keeping Our Senior Neighbors Safe in Extreme Weather

When the cold weather strikes, our elderly and disabled neighbors may need extra assistance. Here are some of the ways you can help

them stay safe and sound:

- Offer your phone number for emergency calls and check on elderly loved ones and friends regularly to make sure they're safe.
- During severe weather, see if they need transportation to and from medical appointments or to the grocery store.
- Make sure they have emergency supplies on hand.
- If loved ones are cognitively or physically disabled, arrange for someone to stay with them during a weather emergency.

Avoiding Fatal Mistakes that Could Cause Home Fires

Unfortunately, home fires are one of the most common causes of winter fatalities among seniors. Improper use of space heaters and other heating devices can result in fires that can consume your home or apartment. Here are some fire safety tips when heating your home:

- Keep clothing, curtains and blankets away from space heaters.
- Never smoke in bed or when you're drowsy.
- Never use kerosene heaters or stoves to heat your home.
- Make sure all smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are in working order throughout your home.