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Contact: Chuck Turner - Disaster Service Coordinator

Office: (208) 788-5508

Website: <http://blainecounty.org/> click on Emergency Preparedness

WOOD RIVER VALLEY EMERGENCY PARTNERSHIP PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT – Winter 2010-11

Are You Ready For Winter Wood River Valley?

Would you know what to do in the event of a winter emergency? What would you do if a winter storm caused an extended power outage or snow closed the roads? All Wood River Valley Cities and Blaine County have developed emergency plans to assist residents in recovering from winter storms and conditions which impact us. However, you also have a responsibility to be prepared to manage on your own for a minimum of three days. Every household, business and institution needs an emergency plan for dealing with such outages for up to three days. That is the length of time that most emergency management agencies across the U.S. feel it is reasonable to expect citizens to get along without water or power. This includes providing for your own basic needs such as shelter, food, water, first-aid and sanitation.

As winter approaches Idaho, the Wood River Mayors and Blaine County Commissioners, and Blaine County Sheriff offer the following safety and health precautions related to cold weather and loss of power.

Prepare Before Winter

You can do much to be prepared for winter conditions. For example, service your snow removal equipment and have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways. Make sure you have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off. Winterize your home. You can extend the life of your fuel supply at home by insulating walls and attics; caulk and weather-strip your home doors and windows; install storm windows; ensure pipes are insulated. Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair, with a winter emergency kit in each. Ensure your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors have fresh batteries.

72 Hour Preparedness

Have 72-hour emergency supply kits on hand in case of an emergency. You may need to survive on your own after a winter emergency. This means having your own food, water, and other supplies in sufficient quantity to last for at least three days. Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a winter storm event, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. You could get help in hours, or it might take days. In addition, basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment, and telephones may be cut off for extended periods.

Have a Communications Plan

In case family members are separated from one another during a winter storm (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back

together. Our Valley is renowned for supporting each other during emergencies. You may want to include elderly friends, relatives and neighbors who live alone in your plan.

- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact."
- After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.
- Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a severe winter storm.
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, or fire department, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.
- Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has a cell phone, or a pre-paid phone card to call the emergency contact. If you have a cell phone, program that person(s) as "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) in your phone. If you are in an accident, emergency personnel will often check your ICE listings in order to get a hold of someone you know. Make sure to tell your family and friends that you've listed them as emergency contacts.
- Teach family members how to use text messaging (also known as SMS or Short Message Service). Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.
- If you have children in school, know what the school emergency plan is for winter storm events.
- Talk with neighbors about your emergency plan.
- If you have pets, include them in your planning process – what will they need?
- Subscribe to the Blaine County E-911 Emergency Notification alert services. From the Blaine County website (<http://www.blainecounty.org/>) click on E-911 "Emergency Notification" in the left-hand column and follow instructions.

Have safe emergency back-up heating equipment available.

- Fireplace with ample supply of wood.
- Small, well-vented, wood, coal, or camp stove with fuel.
- Portable space heaters. (Kerosene Heaters: Check with your local fire department on the legality of using kerosene heaters in your community. Use only the correct fuel for your unit and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Refuel outdoors only, and only when cool. Keep your kerosene heater at least 3 feet away from furniture and other flammable objects.)
- Generators can be an excellent back-up power supply when used and installed properly. Always have generators installed by a qualified electrician. Run generators outside, downwind of structures. NEVER run a generator indoors as it creates carbon monoxide gas.
- DO NOT use your barbecue grill (charcoal or gas) to cook indoors. It can cause a buildup of carbon monoxide gas.
- DO NOT use your gas oven to heat your home -- prolonged use of an open oven in a closed house can create carbon monoxide gas.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

If someone you know is elderly or dependent on life-sustaining or health-related equipment such as a ventilator, respirator or oxygen concentrator, you should make plans now to ensure their needs are met during severe winter weather and possible power outages.

1. Help them stock a home disaster kit including a flashlight and extra batteries, a battery-operated radio, bottled water, non-perishable foods, essential medicines, and extra blankets or sleeping bags.
2. Check on them after a storm or power outage.
3. Register them as a special needs customer with their utility so they will become a priority customer. Notify others who could provide help such as neighbors, relatives, nearby friends and local emergency responders such as the fire department.
4. Have a list of emergency numbers readily available.
5. Have a standby generator or an alternative source of power available. Be aware of the safety rules for its use.

Protecting Pets

Emergency managers strongly recommend that you plan in advance to leave pets with friends or family or a boarding facility, or that you research hotels and motels that accept pets and where you could stay if you needed to evacuate.

A supply kit for your pet is also a must, for evacuation situations but also in case you need to get through an emergency -- such as a blizzard -- at home. The kit should include:

- A leash and a carrier. A pet friendly shelter will require your animal to be leashed and/or crated. The pet carrier should be large enough for the animal to stand up and turn around in.
- Pet identification. Your pet should wear an identification tag and rabies tag.
- Contact information and a photo of you and your pet. The County's Animal Control Center will require these.
- At least three days worth of food and plenty of extra water.
- Extra medications, if your pet takes them.
- Pet sanitation supplies.
- The pet's immunization and medical records. The County's Animal Control Center will require these if your pet stays there during an emergency.
- Your pet should be licensed, as required by County law. And consider micro-chipping; you can have your pet micro-chipped at all local veterinary offices.

If you stay at home during a winter power outage:

- Stock an emergency supply of food and water for yourself and your pets. If you or your pets are on continual medications, be sure to always have at least a two-week supply on hand.
- Avoid leaving animals outside or confined to hard surfaces (e.g., in garages).
- If you routinely take your dog (pet) in the car, be sure to keep a leash or other restraint in the car. Put extra blankets in the car to keep the animal warm.
- After the storm, check on your neighbors and their animals. Be sure they have proper heating and sufficient supplies to get them through the emergency.

On The Farm

- Move animals to sheltered areas.
- Haul extra feed to nearby feeding areas.
- Have a water supply available. Most animal deaths in winter storms occur from dehydration.

During a Power Outage

Heating Safety

When temperatures fall and power goes out, the possibility of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning rises as people try to stay warm. Invisible, odorless and tasteless, CO is a highly poisonous gas produced by the burning of fuel such as gasoline, natural gas, kerosene, charcoal or wood. Unvented or faulty gas and kerosene appliances have the greatest potential to produce dangerous levels of CO in a home. Smoldering or poorly vented fireplaces, slow-burning fuels such as charcoal and vehicle exhausts also are potential indoor hazards. Take these precautions:

- Look at the color of the flame. A hot blue flame produces less CO and more heat than a flickering yellow flame. If you see yellow flames in your furnace or stove burner, it should be adjusted so that the flame is blue.
- Don't use an unvented gas or kerosene heater in closed spaces, especially sleeping areas.
- Don't use gas appliances such as an oven, range or clothes dryer to heat your home
- Don't burn charcoal inside a house, garage, vehicle or tent for heating or cooking, even in a fireplace.
- Look for CO exposure symptoms including headache, dizziness, weakness, sleepiness, nausea and vomiting that can progress to disorientation, coma, convulsions and death.
- If you suspect CO poisoning, open doors and windows, turn off gas appliances, and go outside for fresh air. Call 9-1-1 emergency medical services in severe cases.
- To prevent residential fires, make sure heaters, stoves, and fireplaces are at least three feet from anything that burns. Use screens in front of fireplaces, and do not leave children alone with space heaters. Never leave candles burning when you are not at home or while you are sleeping. If a heater uses fuel such as propane or kerosene, use only that kind of fuel and add more fuel only when the heater is cool. Store all fuels outside in closed metal containers.

Guidelines for action during a winter storm or under conditions of extreme cold:

- Listen to your radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio for weather reports and emergency information.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If

symptoms of hypothermia are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first, and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Get medical help as soon as possible.

- Conserve fuel by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive, consider the following:
 - Travel in the day, don't travel alone, and keep others informed of your schedule
 - Stay on main roads; avoid back road shortcuts

Extreme Cold Exposure

Prolonged exposure to the cold can cause frostbite, hypothermia, or in extreme cases, death. Infants and the elderly are most susceptible to extreme cold. Frostbite occurs when the skin becomes cold enough to actually freeze. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, or the nose are symptoms of frostbite. Hypothermia (low body temperature) can occur during longer periods of exposure when the body temperature drops below 95°F. A person will become disoriented, confused, and shiver uncontrollably, eventually leading to drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. In severe cases, death is possible. The following tips can help decrease the risk of cold exposure:

- Wear layered clothing outdoors for better protection from the cold. Wear a cap to prevent rapid heat loss from an uncovered head. Cover exposed skin to prevent frostbite.
- While indoors, try to keep at least one room heated to 70°F. This is especially important for the elderly and small children to prevent hypothermia.
- Sleep warm with extra blankets, a warm cap, socks and layered clothing.
- Avoid fatigue and exhaustion during cold weather. Overexertion, such as shoveling snow or pushing a car, can strain your heart.
- Carry extra clothing, blankets and high energy snacks, such as cereal or candy bars in your car for protection if car stalls. Keep the gas tank near full to prevent icing. Don't travel alone.
- Check daily on elderly friends, relatives and neighbors who live alone.
- The elderly and very young should stay indoors as much as possible. Offer to shop for elderly friends and relatives. Just like in the summer with heat, it takes some time to get acclimated to cold weather.

Dress for the weather:

- Wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
- Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves.
- Wear a hat.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

Proper use of Candles

Home fires are a threat after a power outage and fire trucks may have trouble getting to your home. If the power is out, use flashlights or other battery-powered lights if possible, instead of candles. If you must use candles, place them in safe holders away from anything that could catch fire. Never leave a burning candle unattended. Never leave candles burning when you are not at home or while you are sleeping.

Food Safety

Power outages present problems with food safety as well as with heating. If there has been a loss of power for more than four hours, take the following precautions with refrigerated food products:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Discard any potentially hazardous foods such as meats, eggs, dairy products and leftovers that may have exceeded 41 F. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Frozen foods in a freezer can normally be kept up to 48 hours without power. Again, the 41 F rule applies. A frozen product that has thawed should not be refrozen—it should be used immediately or disposed of. Thawed foods that have not reached 41 F can be cooked and consumed.

Eat and Drink Wisely & Avoid Alcohol

Eating high-energy, well-balanced meals will help you stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic beverages -- they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages such as hot chocolate or sweetened coffee or tea to help maintain your body temperature. If you have any dietary restrictions, ask your doctor. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

AFTER THE STORM

- Report downed power lines and broken gas lines immediately.
- After blizzards, heavy snows or extreme cold, check to see that no physical damage has occurred and that water pipes are functioning. If there are no other problems, wait for streets and roads to be opened before you attempt to drive anywhere.
- Check on neighbors, especially anyone who might need help.
- Beware of overexertion and exhaustion. Shoveling snow in extreme cold causes many heart attacks. Set your priorities and pace yourself after any disaster that leaves you with a mess to clean up. The natural tendency is to do too much too soon.