

Safety Note #203

Winter Storm Preparedness



During the winter months, weather systems can result in periods of heavy rain, high winds, snow fall in mountainous regions, and the potential for flooding. When severe winter weather threatens to impact portions of California, we recommend staying informed and taking precautions both at work and at home, using the following **Winter Weather Safety Tips**:

STAY INFORMED:

- Monitor the weather reports provided by your local news media. Emergency information will be provided through radio and TV broadcasts and via Wireless Emergency Alerts texted to cell phones (<http://calalerts.com>).
- Most counties have text or email alerting systems for emergency notifications, targeted to your area. To find out what alerts are available in your area, do an Internet search with your town, city, or county name and the word “alerts” or “emergency notification.”
- Think about how you will stay informed if there is a power outage. Have extra batteries for a battery-operated radio and your cell phone. Consider having a hand crank radio or cell phone charger.
- Establish communication plans for emergencies. You should have a plan for the workplace and for your family. You may not be together when disaster strikes, so think about how you will communicate and where you will meet. Practice and review your plan.
- Know your evacuation routes, identify several escape routes for your location if roads are blocked; include plans for evacuating pets/livestock.
- If you will evacuate by car, keep your gas tank at least half-full, car maintained in good condition, and a “Go Bag” of emergency supplies and a change of clothes in the vehicle.
- If you may need to evacuate to a shelter, download the American Red Cross Shelter Finder app. This app displays open shelters and provides the capacity and current population. Visit www.redcross.org/mobile-apps/shelter-finder-app (you can also text SHELTER + your ZIP code to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area.)

PREPARE AND PROTECT:

Take steps to prepare and protect your home and workplace from winter weather and storm damage:

- Have employee contact information on hand and the ability to communicate after business hours; the attached Employee Emergency Contact List template may be useful for managers/supervisors.
- Determine if employees can work from home. Establish a plan for days in which employees are unable to physically come into the office. Review telecommute tips and guidance here: https://safety.ucanr.edu/Programs/emergency/Current_Health_Alerts/Guidance_for_Telecommuters/ or see UC ANR Human Resources information about remote work agreements: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/ANRSPU/ELR/Telecommuting/>
- Store vital records/documents safely, and have backups. Vital paper copies that cannot be replaced should be scanned in advance, and the hardcopy kept in a fireproof, waterproof box or file cabinet. Records that can be kept electronically should be backed-up, by use of an external hard drive, flash drive, and/or secure cloud-based service. Remember cybersecurity for your data and backups, see <https://it.ucanr.edu/Security/>
- Anticipate power outages. Charge all personal devices while power is available and have flashlights with spare batteries readily accessible.
- Keep gutters and drains free of debris, however do not work at heights in wet/slippery weather.
- If you live or work in flood-prone areas, keep emergency building materials handy, such as plywood, plastic sheeting, and sandbags for waterproofing.

- Insulate water pipes with insulation or newspaper and plastic. Know how to shut off water valves if a pipe bursts.
- Check with your location's Facilities or Operations departments about ways to protect pipes from freezing. In some cases, it may be advised that during freezing conditions water faucets be left slightly open, to allow them to drip, in order to keep water flowing through the pipes that are most vulnerable to freezing. This may not be advised in newer facilities/construction.
- Winterize your home or workplace by insulating walls and attics, caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, and weather/water-proofing basements.
- Replace the windshield wipers on your vehicles every fall.
- If the power goes out, close off unused rooms to consolidate and retain heat.
- NEVER use generators, outdoor heating or cooking equipment, or a gasoline or propane heater INDOORS.

IF YOU MUST GO OUT IN THE STORM:

- Avoid unnecessary trips. If you must travel during the storm, dress in warm, loose layers of clothing. Advise others of your destination, route and expected time of arrival.
- When you must go out, watch for hazards such as fallen trees and power poles, serious flooding, landslides, mud and rocks on the road, or pavement slipping.
- If you see flood water on roads, walkways, bridges, and on the ground, do NOT attempt to cross. The depth of the water is not always obvious and the roadbed may be washed out under the water.
- Moving water has tremendous power. A mere 6 inches of moving water can knock over an adult. It takes just 12 inches of moving water to carry away a small car, while 2 feet of moving water can easily sweep an SUV off the road.
- Keep away from downed power lines and any other electrical wires, nearby water may be charged.

FIVE P's of EVACUATION:

Be ready to grab essential items quickly if asked to Evacuate. Consider the five P's of evacuation:

- **People** – and if safely possible, pets and other animals or livestock;
- **Prescriptions** – with dosages, medicines, medical equipment, eyeglasses, hearing aids, etc.
- **Papers** – including important documents and flash drives/thumb drives;
- **Personal Needs** – such as clothes, cash, protection;
- **Priceless Items** – including pictures, irreplaceable mementos and valuables.

Relevant Safety Notes:

For more detail on related topics, see these Safety Notes: [166 Office Preparedness for Emergencies](#), [167 Be Informed about Emergencies](#), [168 Make a Plan for Emergencies](#), [169 Build a Kit of Emergency Supplies](#), [189 Preparedness for Supervisors/Directors](#) or the [Fact Sheet on Flooding](#) from the ANR [Disasters Happen](#) Guide.