

Winter Weather

December 2024



Be Prepared!

While Virginia does not experience the extreme winter weather other parts of the country do, every year there is a threat of snow, low temperatures, and ice. Take the time now to review and prepare for the potential severe weather this winter.

Winterize Your Home



Heat Sources:

- Have heat sources inspected and cleaned every year by a qualified professional.
- Replace furnace and heat pump filters once a month or as needed.
- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from all heat sources.
- Ensure vents are clean and unobstructed.
- Have your fueled tanks filled and track levels throughout the winter.
- Dust accumulation in heat sources can be a fire hazard.

Winterize Your Home



Fireplaces:

- Remember to have heat sources inspected and cleaned every year by a qualified professional.
- Check the seal on the fireplace flue damper and make it as snug as possible.
- If the fireplace is never used, plug and seal the chimney flue.
- In wood-burning fireplaces, creosote buildup from burning wood or animal nests can cause fire hazards.

Fire Safety:

- Install and maintain battery-powered or battery back-up carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms.
- Have carbon monoxide sensors installed on each floor. Install smoke alarms inside each bedroom and on every level of the home, including the basement.
- Carbon monoxide incidents are more common during the colder months, stay vigilant.

Winterize Your Home



Water Pipes:

- Keep water pipes from freezing by wrapping them in heat tape and insulating with newspaper or plastic.
- Drain the water from outdoor garden hoses. Disconnect hoses from faucets. Cover the faucets.
- Keep the furnace running at 55 degrees Fahrenheit or higher to ensure the home stays above freezing temperatures.
- Learn how to shut off the main water valves in case of emergency.
- Water-leak sensors, emergency pressure release valves, and automatic water shutoffs can help save your house from massive damage due to a burst pipe.

Winterize Your Home



Air Leaks:

- Detect and seal air leaks. On the outside of your home, inspect all areas where two different building materials meet. Inside your home, inspect any cracks and gaps.
- Caulk and water-strip doors and windowsills.
- Tightly seal heavy-duty, clear plastic film to the inside of window frames during winter months.
- Install insulating drapes or shades on drafty windows.
- Opening curtains on the south-facing windows during the day allow sunlight to naturally heat the home.

Air Flow:

- Change the direction of your ceiling fans to circulate warm air. The counter-clockwise rotation circulates cool air, while a clockwise rotation creates an updraft, which pushes the warm air that has risen back down into the room.
- Remove window AC units during winter months to prevent cold air from coming through the cracks. If you can't remove your AC unit, put a heavy tarp over it to cover it.

Winterize Your Home



Insulation:

- Insulate the walls between living spaces and unheated garages, shed roofs, or storage areas. Also insulate foundation walls above ground level and in heated basements.
- A properly insulated attic can lower your energy bills and help guard against ice dams.
- If too much heat escapes into the attic, it can warm the ice and snow on the roof. When it refreezes, it can cause an ice dam, which can lead to water damage inside your home or possibly even a roof collapse.

Slips, Trips, and Falls:

- Keep driveways and sidewalks clear of debris.
- Repair any issues with steps and handrails.
- Sprinkle de-icing salt, sand, or kitty litter to make walkways and steps less slippery.
- Ice, snow, and wind can weaken trees and cause branches to fall. Trim trees and remove dead branches.
- Avoid shoveling or blowing snow against the foundation of the home as it could lead to foundation issues.

Winterize Your Home



Roofing:

- Inspect the roof. Look for broken, frayed, curled, or missing shingles; clogged valleys; damaged flashing; or deterioration.
- Clear any debris from the roof.
- Cut back overhanging branches to prevent damage to shingles and gutters.
- Check the attic and ceilings for staining from water leakage. While you're up there, make sure the attic is properly vented to prevent mold and mildew.
- Snow and ice accumulation can make it challenging for your roof to sustain the unusually heavy weight.

Gutters:

- Keep gutters clear of leaves, sticks, and other debris to ensure melting snow can properly drain.
- Installing gutter guards and heat tape to keep debris out and keep the water flowing to help prevent icicles and ice dams from forming.
- Make sure downspouts direct water away from the foundation.
- Your gutters work overtime in the winter to keep water away from your home. Failing to clean your gutters before winter can lead to clogged gutters, sagging or detached gutters, mold build-up, ice dams, and/or roof leaks.


Budget-Friendly Tips



Low-cost Tips for Keeping Your Home Warm:

- To save on heating bills, close the doors of rooms you are not using.
- Close the vents and shut the doors in unused rooms, and keep the basement door closed.
- Place a rolled towel at the bottom of all doors to keep drafts out.
- About 30% of home's heating energy is lost through its windows. Keep window coverings like blinds or curtains open during the day to take advantage of the sun's heat in the winter--especially windows that get direct sunlight.
- Close blinds and curtains at night to prevent heat from escaping.
- If you have gaps around the windows, try using weather stripping or caulk to keep the cold air out. You can also apply inexpensive window insulation kits that create an airtight seal around windows.

Preventing House Fires

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- Keep anything that can burn at least three (3) feet from all heat sources including: fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, portable heaters, and/or candles.
 - Always plug space heaters directly into an outlet, and make sure the cord isn't damaged or frayed.
 - Never use an oven to heat your home.
 - Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected each year by a professional.
 - Install and maintain battery-powered or battery back-up carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms.
 - Have a fire extinguisher in an easily-accessible area in the event of small fires.
 - Visit the U.S. Fire Administration to learn more about how to prepare for and prevent home fires.

Power Outages



Preparing for Power Outages:

- Keep freezers and refrigerators closed. Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40 degrees Fahrenheit or higher for two hours or more; or that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- If you use a generator, **ONLY** use it outdoors and away from windows.
- Do **NOT** use a gas stove or oven to heat your home.
- Disconnect appliances and electronics to avoid damage from electrical surges.
- Have alternative plans for refrigerating medicines or using power-dependent medical devices.
- Go to a community location with power if cold is extreme and you can't safely heat your home.

Generator Safety:

- Generators and fuel should always be used outdoors and *at least* 20 feet away from windows, doors, and attached garages in a dry area.
- Install working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can kill you, your family, and your pets.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions carefully, such as cooling the generator before a refuel.

Safe Travel

Know Before You Go:

- Be aware of the winter risks in the areas you are traveling in. Check local weather forecasts and warnings before traveling.
- If the roads are not in good shape, consider postponing non-essential travel until the roads are cleared. If you do have to go out, make sure you are prepared in case you become delayed while traveling.
- Tell others your route and anticipated arrival time.
- Keep family and emergency phone numbers, including your auto insurance provider and a towing company in your phone.

Vehicle Emergency Kit:

- Every vehicle should have an emergency supply kit in the truck.
- Kits should be checked every six months and expired items should be replaced regularly:
 - Snow shovel and ice scraper
 - Abrasive material (sand or kitty litter) in case your vehicle becomes stuck
 - Jumper cables, flashlight, and warning devices
 - First aid kit, and any necessary medication
 - Blanket for protection from the cold
 - A cell phone and charger
 - Water and food

Safe Travel




On the Road:

- Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition before you travel.
- Keep your gas tank as full as you can. A full tank will also keep the fuel line from freezing.
- Make sure your tires have enough tread.
- When driving, increase your following distances from 3-4 seconds to 5-6 seconds. It takes longer to slow down and stop on icy roads.

In the Event of an Emergency:

- Stay with your car and don't overexert yourself.
- Let your car be seen. Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light on.
- Be mindful of carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of any snow and run your car sporadically- just long enough to stay warm. Don't run your car for long periods of time with the windows up or in an enclosed space.

Tips for Elders

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- Engage your support network if you need help clearing ice and snow from your property so that you can keep outside walkways and steps clear of snow and ice.
 - Low lighting is a major cause of falls, so make sure there is enough lighting outdoors, especially near walkways and stairs.
 - Have the name and contact information of a nearby family member or friend who can regularly check in on you.
 - Make sure your steps are sturdy and have textured grip to reduce falls if the weather is icy or wet.
 - If you use walking aids such as a cane, walker, or a wheelchair, dry the wheels or tips of each before entering your home.
 - Keep a small table or shelf near the door to put items on while unlocking the door. This reduces distractions and dangers of slipping or tripping while trying to enter your home.
 - If your home's main entrance is often icy during the winter months, use a different entrance if you can.
 - Stay warm by dressing warmly and in layers, and remember to eat enough food to keep yourself at a healthy weight.

Tips for those who Work Outside



- Be careful if you spend significant time outdoors.
- Wear several layers of loose clothing, layering provides better insulation.
- Make sure to protect the ears, face, hands, and feet in extremely cold weather. Boots should be waterproof and insulated. Wear a hat; it will keep your whole body warmer.
- Move into warm locations during work breaks and try to limit the amount of time outside on extremely cold days.
- Carry cold weather gear, such as: extra socks, gloves, hats, jackets, blankets, a change of clothes, and a thermos of hot liquid.
- Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin.

Frostbite and Hypothermia



Frostbite:

- Wear layers of warm clothing and avoid overexertion outside.
- Frostbite causes loss of feeling and color around the face, fingers, and toes.
- Signs:
 - Numbness; white or grayish-yellow skin; firm or waxy skin
- Actions:
 - Go to a warm room
 - Soak in warm water--do not use hot water
 - Use body heat to warm
 - Do not massage or use a heating pad

Hypothermia:

- Hypothermia is an unusually low body temperature. A temperature below 95 degrees Fahrenheit is an emergency.
- Signs:
 - Shivering; exhaustion; confusion; fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, or drowsiness
- Actions:
 - Go to a warm room
 - Warm the center of the body first--chest, neck, head and groin
 - Keep dry and wrapped in warm blankets, including the head and neck