



Check out road conditions: Nebraska 511 or if out of state 402-471-4533; Colorado 303-639-1111; Kansas 800-585-7623; Wyoming 888-996-7623.

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Winter Weather Awareness Day in Nebraska was declared back on Nov. 8, however, winter weather didn't show up around here until Dec. 19—and it came with a vengeance.

A full-fledged blizzard a week ago was a good reminder that we all became complacent about being prepared for the danger of severe winter weather in southwest Nebraska.

Blowing snow, low visibility, dismissed schools and dangerous travel conditions were instantly upon us. Even though the forecast was well ahead of the storm's arrival, many were caught unprepared.

The information and tips for safety that follow were released by the National Weather Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Risks

Each year, dozens of Americans die due to exposure to the cold. Account for vehicle accidents and fatalities, fires due to dangerous use of heaters and other winter weather fatalities, and you have a significant threat.

Other hazards, such as hypothermia and frostbite, can lead to the loss of fingers and toes or cause permanent internal injuries and even death.

The very young and the elderly are among those most vulnerable to the potentially harsh winter conditions. Recognizing the threats and knowing what to do when they occur could prevent the loss of extremities or save a life.

A winter storm can last for several days and be accompanied by high winds, freezing rain or sleet, heavy snowfall and cold temperatures.

People can be trapped at home or in a car with no utilities or assistance, and those who attempt to walk for help could find themselves in a deadly situation.

The aftermath of a winter storm can have an impact on a community or region for days, weeks, or possibly months.

Wind Chill

In our area of the state, wind is always a factor. Wind accompanying cold temperatures increases susceptibility to frostbite or hypothermia and can become life-threatening.

- Wind Chill is not the actual temperature, but rather how the combination of wind and cold temperatures feel on exposed skin.

It is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin, and as the wind speed increases, heat is carried away from the body at an accelerated rate, driving down the body temperature.

Wind chill will also impact animals, but not impact inanimate objects such as cars or exposed water pipes, because they cannot cool below the actual air temperature.

The NWS Wind Chill Index uses advances in science, technology, and computer modeling to provide an accurate, understandable, and useful formula for calculating the dangers from winter winds and freezing temperatures.

More information about the Wind Chill Index can be found at: www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill

Winter Weather Dangers

- Frostbite is damage to body tissue caused by extreme cold. A wind chill of -20°F will cause frostbite in just 30 minutes.

Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes or the tip of the nose.

If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately! If you must wait for help, slowly rewarm affected areas. However, if the person is also showing signs of hypothermia, warm the body core before the extremities.

- Hypothermia is a condition brought on when extremities are excessively cold, and the body temperature drops to less than 95°F . It can kill.

For those who survive, there are likely to be lasting kidney, liver and pancreas problems.

Warning signs include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. Take the person's temperature. If below 95°F , seek medical care immediately!

If medical care is not available, warm the person slowly, starting with the body core. Warming the arms and legs first drives cold blood toward the heart and can lead to heart failure!

If necessary, use your body heat to help. Get the person into dry clothing and wrap in a warm blanket covering the head and neck.

Do not give the person alcohol, drugs, coffee or any hot beverage or food. Warm broth is the first food to offer.

- Remember to Avoid Overexertion! Avoid activities such as shoveling heavy snow, pushing a car, or walking in deep snow. The strain from the cold and the hard labor could cause a heart attack, and sweating could lead to a chill and hypothermia.

Did You Know?

Injuries Related to Cold:

- 50 percent happen to people over 60 years old
- More than 75 percent happen to males

- About 20 percent occur in the home

Injuries Related to Ice and Snow:

- About 70 percent result from vehicle accidents
- About 25 percent occur to those caught in a storm
- Most happen to males over 40 years old