

Now is the Time to Prepare



As we all are aware, the cold weather conditions are amongst us. Winter storms create a higher risk of car accidents, hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, and heart attacks from overexertion. Winter storms can bring extreme cold, freezing rain, snow, ice, and high winds. We ask our residents and businesses to be prepared for another cold winter. We recommend the following practices, not all-inclusive methods; more may be needed:

Plumbing

- To keep outdoor plumbing fixtures from freezing - disconnect and store any garden hoses as the weather begins to turn cold.
 - Shut off the water, outdoor faucets, drain the lines and insulate the hose bibs.
 - If your indoor faucets are piped along exterior walls, they aren't adequately. Place your faucets to a slow drip, usually essential only during particularly bitter cold days.
 - Faucets and pipes located laterally with exterior walls are especially susceptible to freezing, insulating your pipes, and are highly recommended in older homes.
 - Both lines, hot and cold, should be opened slightly since both are acceptable to the cold weather.
 - Also, consider leaving cabinet doors open so your pipes will be warmed from the room air.
- Should a water line ever freeze and burst, you will need to immediately shut off the home's water supply. If items block easy access to your main water shut valve, rearrange the area to make easy access during a plumbing emergency.
- The water shut-off valve is in good working order. Turning the valve handle clockwise should shut off all water. (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Leaving you home

- Leaving your home for lengthy periods during the winter, consider shutting off the water to your house and draining your water system.
- When leaving, ensure your vehicle is adequately prepared for the trip; click on Figure 2.



Figure 2

Outside exposed areas

- Ensure your home outside sprinkler system is shut off and ensure the backflow preventer is drained.
- If the garage is attached to your home, minimize the opening time of the door.

- Beware of plumbing fixtures in your garage and piping that run along walls between the house and garage.
- Full gutters increase your chance of ice forming on your roof, so setting time to cleanse gutters before the freezing temperatures arrive is an intelligent choice.
- Cable wires or phone lines enter your home, and freezing air; insulation can help insulate them.
- Use weather stripping, spray foam insulation, or caulking to remedy any cracks around your doors and windows.

Indoor preparation

- Install Carbon Monoxide and Smoke Detectors; if installed, check batteries (Figure 3).
- The thermostat runs continuously some days keep spare batteries on hand.
- Use only flashlights or battery-powered lanterns for emergency lighting. NEVER use candles during a blackout or power outage due to the extreme risk of fire.
- Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. **Never use** a grill, camp stove, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, or any partially enclosed area. These should only be utilized outdoors and at least 20 feet away from windows



Figure 3

on

Generators

- Never use a generator inside a home, basement, shed, or garage, even if doors and windows are open.
- If the commercially installed generator is at your residence or business, make sure the fuel is readily available and ready to use. If supplied by a propane tank, ensure it is filled before cold conditions set in.
- Keep generators outside and far away from your home. Windows, doors, and vents could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors. Read both the label on your generator and the owner's manual and follow the instructions. (Figure 4)

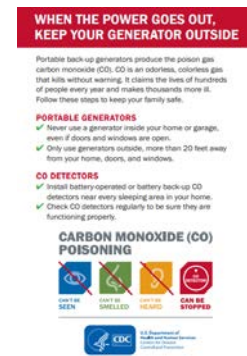


Figure 4

Food

- Power Outages can impact food safety in your refrigerator and freezer.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep your food as fresh as possible. The refrigerator will keep food cold; it could be four hours or more.
- A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours and maybe longer. Use coolers with ice if necessary.
- Monitor any food that has been exposed to a temperature of 40° Fahrenheit (4° Celsius) or higher for two hours or more, or that has an unusual odor, color, or texture. **When in doubt, throw it out!**
- Drinking water is still essential during cold conditions; dehydration is a concern.

People

- Check on neighbors who may require assistance if it is safe to do so. This includes infants, children, older adults, people with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs.
- Additionally, many websites help guide and suggest precautions for freezing conditions. **Now is the time. Don't wait** until the last minute.
- Lastly, 911 services are usually always available for immediate needs. Please keep in mind that the response times become slower if conditions are unfavorable for driving conditions.
 - In very slim chances, emergency services may not be able to respond. So, staying with neighbors, friends, or family members; maybe your best choice before the weather and road conditions deteriorate for unfavorable driving conditions.



Stay safe and warm,

Austin County Office of Emergency Management

For more information, visit:

- Car Safety: <https://www.weather.gov/safety/winter-before>.
- Generator Safety: <https://www.cdc.gov/co/generatorsafetyfactsheet.html>
- General Storm Safety: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/winter-storm.html>
- The Spruce: <https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-protect-your-home-from-freezing-temperatures-1388721>