

Dealing with snowy conditions

Publisher's note: *The following is from Placer County.*

Tahoe area residents may be experts dealing with snow, but travelers who visit and find themselves in a sudden storm may be caught off guard. How many stories have you heard about people being stuck on the freeway for hours waiting for the roads to clear? Some of us have certainly been there.

Here are a few tips for those less experienced with snow conditions.

Before you go, have an emergency plan in place and tell someone your itinerary.

Check with the National Weather Service or go online to check on weather conditions for the area you'll be visiting. It's also very important to check with snowCaltrans on road conditions. Call (800) 427-ROAD (7623). Snow conditions will require chains, especially if your vehicle isn't a four-wheel drive with snow tread tires. It isn't uncommon for weather conditions to cause spin-outs and accidents, especially on major highways such as I-80 and Hwy. 50. Be prepared for road closures. A variety of weather-related storm conditions, such as zero visibility, high winds or avalanches, can cause road closures.

Make sure your car is stocked with extra water, food, blankets and dry clothes. The gas tank should be at least half full and your tires should be checked before you leave home. Tools in your trunk should include a shovel and scraper. Use windshield wiper fluid that does not freeze. A bag of sand or burlap bags will give traction to tires mired in snow.

Be aware of snow plows, which push large amounts of snow onto road shoulders with heavy force. Snow berms block visibility, so don't park your car or stand near one in order to remain

visible to the snow plow operator. And, snow blowers hurl snow, ice, rock and other debris at high speed. Stay away when in use.

Dress for snow by wearing layers of loose-fitting, lightweight warm clothing. Include mittens, which are warmer than gloves, and a hat and scarf to protect your head and lungs.

Foothill residents should be prepared for an occasional snow storm and storm-related power outages. Pets should be brought inside. Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly. Make sure your family's emergency kit is stocked with flashlights, extra batteries, candles, a battery-operated radio, extra blankets and warm clothes.

Be aware of potential dangers, such as carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide is clear, odorless and deadly. Make sure vents, chimneys and flues are not blocked or clogged and that there are working carbon monoxide and smoke detectors in the house.

Don't use portable kerosene or gas heaters or charcoal briquettes for heating within an enclosed area. Electric space heaters can be used for heating small areas, but can be dangerous if they become overheated, get knocked over, or come in contact with flammable materials. Fireplace ashes not properly disposed of can cause fire. Homes have burned down when ashes were put into containers that were not metal. Don't store warm ashes in garages, decks or trash cans.

One of the best defenses against an unexpected situation is to be prepared and use common sense. Drive slower in bad weather. Leave earlier. Make a checklist of things to do to winterize your car or home. Write an emergency plan with your family. Stock up on emergency items.