

Opinion: Are you prepared for a winter storm?

By Rebecca Wass

In the midst of the winter season many people who travel to and live in the Lake Tahoe area may forget about some common winter safety precautions, especially when it's storming outside. According to National Weather Service, nearly 70 percent of injuries during winter storms result from vehicle accidents and about 25 percent of injuries result from being caught outside in a storm.

Some of the hazards associated with winter storms include:



- Slips and falls due to slippery walkways
- Driving accidents due to slippery roadways
- Carbon monoxide poisoning
- Hypothermia and frostbite due to the cold weather exposure
- Being struck by falling objects such as icicles, tree limbs and utility poles
- Electrocution due to downed power lines or objects in contact with power lines
- Falls from heights, such as falls from roof or skylights while removing snow
- Roof collapse under weight of snow (or melting snow if

drains are clogged)

- Burns from fires caused by energized line contact or equipment failure
- Dehydration
- Back injuries or heart attack while removing snow

“We see a lot of slips and falls with the older generation,” said Cynthia Burkart, registered nurse and Barton’s director of Occupational Health. “It’s important for people to walk slower when there is ice and snow about and pick up their feet, take short steps, be cautious, make sure to have good soles on their shoes and “do not” wear high heels.”

Winter walking tips:

- A pair of well insulated boots with good rubber treads is a must for walking during or after a winter storm. Keeping a pair of rubber over-shoes with good treads which fit over your street shoes is a good idea during the winter months.
- When walking on a sidewalk which has not been cleared and you must walk in the street, walk against the traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
- Be on the lookout for vehicles that may have lost traction and are slipping toward you.
- Be aware that approaching vehicles may not be able to stop at crosswalks or traffic signals.
- During the daytime, wear sunglasses to help you see better and avoid hazards.

Burkart also suggests that if people do decide to walk in the snow, to be sure and walk toward traffic and wear bright clothing.

“We have found that many people come in with broken wrists, or

fall forward and hit their heads," she said.

When it comes to driving in the winter she says, "If you don't have to go out, why put yourself and others at risk?"

"But if you do decide to drive, be sure to have an emergency kit in your car," Burkart said. "Have your vehicle inspected to ensure the following all of your brakes, fluids, electrical, battery, tire tread, lights, windshield wipers and defroster are all working properly."

Besides carrying tire chains, also carry an emergency kit in your vehicle:

- Blankets/sleeping bags and extra winter clothes
- Cellular telephone or two-way radio
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper and snow brush
- Traction aids (bag of sand or cat litter)
- Flashlight with fresh/extra batteries
- Matches
- Emergency flares and jumper cables
- Snacks and water
- Road maps

If a storm strands you in your vehicle, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, staying in your vehicle when stranded is often the safest choice if winter storms create poor visibility or if roadways are ice covered. These steps will increase your safety when stranded:

- Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna as a signal to rescuers and raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing)

- Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers
- Stay awake. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems
- Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning
- Keep moving to improve your circulation and stay warm
- Do not eat snow, it will lower your body temperature
- Huddle with other people for warmth
- Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a vehicle can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration

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