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Winter weather precautions

Winter has arrived and the effects of cold weather may be felt throughout Texas for the next few months. Although Texas and many other southern states fare better than those farther north, when temperatures drop, staying warm and avoiding accidents can be a challenge. Many Texas Department of Criminal Justice employees must spend time outside, exposed to inclement weather, for work and travel. The following important steps can help you stay safe when winter strikes.

Be aware of changing weather conditions and be prepared to take action when necessary. This means having a plan in place before trouble strikes. Listen to weather forecasts regularly and check your emergency supplies when ice, snow or extreme cold is predicted. The effects of a winter storm may last for days; think about how you might deal with supply shortages along with the loss of power, transportation and communications.

Helpful items in a winter weather emergency include a battery-powered National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) weather radio; first aid and medical supplies, including regular medications; drinkable

water and high calorie, non perishable foods; charged cell phones and flashlights with extra batteries; and backup heat sources like space heaters.



Don't be caught off guard; make sure you understand what winter storm warnings mean. The most common cold-weather warnings are:

- *Winter Weather Advisory:* Expect winter weather conditions to cause inconvenience and possible hazards.
- *Frost or Freeze Warning:* Expect below-freezing temperatures.

- *Winter Storm Watch:* Be alert; a storm is likely.
- *Winter Storm Warning:* Take action; the storm is in or entering the area.

When you go outside during cold weather, make sure you dress to protect yourself from exposure hazards. Wear layers of warm, loose and lightweight clothing. If you begin to perspire, remove layers until your temperature stabilizes to a normal level. It's important that you try and stay dry.

Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Protect your head with a hat or a hood and cover your mouth to protect your lungs from exposure to extremely cold air. Mittens, snug at the wrist, will keep your hands warmer than gloves.

Remember to prepare your vehicle for winter weather. You can avoid many dangerous winter travel problems by simply following the vehicle's maintenance schedule. Every fall, in addition to the regular maintenance, check to make sure your radiator is working properly and the coolant/antifreeze mixture is fresh and at the proper level. Replace worn

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tires and carry an air gauge so you can maintain the proper pressure. Replace wiper fluid with a nonfreezing winter mixture and keep your gas tank filled to help prevent ice formation in the fuel lines.

Adjust your driving habits when dealing with snow or ice on the road. The main thing to remember is to slow everything down. Accelerate and decelerate slowly. Apply the gas slowly to gain traction and avoid skids. Allow more room to stop, and slow down much earlier than you normally would when the road is dry. You should not use cruise control in snowy or icy conditions.

Working outdoors in cold weather can lead to serious problems, so it's important for you to learn cold weather precautions for your workplace. Every fall, the Health Services Division, aided by Administrative Review and Risk Management, provides cold-weather safety training to both unit staff and offenders to help ensure that they are prepared and properly equipped for cold weather conditions. On Correctional Institutions Division units, weather conditions are carefully monitored and announced via radio. When temperatures drop, appropriate cold-weather clothing is issued to anyone working outside, including thermal underwear, insulated

jackets, cotton or leather gloves, insulated hoods, work shoes and socks.

It's important that every agency employee take winter weather preparedness seriously. A little preparation and caution can prevent unexpected weather situations from turning dangerous.

For more information regarding cold weather safety, contact the Administrative Review and Risk Management office at 936-437-4842, or visit the State Office of Risk Management website. ●