Preparing for winter weather
While infrequent in Alabama, winter weather and storms can wreak havoc across the state. In January 2014, millions were affected when snow and ice paralyzed central Alabama. Thousands were left stranded on roads or at home. Snow, high winds, freezing rain, sleet or ice can all occur during a winter storm. Having a plan and being prepared can limit the impact on you and your family.
WHAT TO EXPECT

WEATHER:
The type of precipitation in a winter storm can vary from intermittent flurries to blizzard conditions, freezing rain and ice. Precipitation type is entirely reliant on the temperature through several layers of the atmosphere, and the timing of temperature changes.

IMPACTS:
Cities, states and even regions of the country can be virtually shut down by winter storms. White-out conditions cause havoc on the roads. Travel can be affected when ice or snow block roadways or cause accidents. Electric service can be disrupted when trees laden with snow or ice fall on power lines. Water pipes can freeze and burst.
PROTECT YOURSELF
Before, During, and After a Winter Storm

BEFORE THE STORM
- Create a family plan for winter emergencies, and discuss how to stay safe in all conditions.
- Stay aware by monitoring the local forecast via radio, TV, internet or smartphone alerts.
- Check both your home and your car’s emergency supply kits to assure that everything is in working order.
- Update your smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors to versions that have a battery backup.

DURING THE STORM
- Avoid being on the roads.
- Outdoor pets should be brought inside.
- Stay indoors as much as possible. If you absolutely have to go outside, keep the duration of your trips short.
- The most effective way to stay warm is by wearing multiple layers of clothing.
- Keep an emergency supply kit in your car if you cannot avoid driving. Be extra careful driving and remain aware of your surroundings.
- DO NOT use a stove to supply heat for your home. Likewise, do not use outdoor grills, gas/propane heaters or generators indoors.
- Do not use generators indoors. Plug appliances directly into your generator. DO NOT plug your generator into your household’s electrical wiring.

AFTER THE STORM
- Make sure roads are safe before driving. While precipitation may have stopped, roads can remain dangerous to drive on for days afterward.
- Dress appropriately for the temperature. Continue dressing in layers and avoiding extended exposure.
- Stay away from downed lines and DO NOT pull tree limbs off downed power lines or make repairs to Alabama Power equipment. Call 1-800-888-2726, and wait for help.
DECEPTIVE KILLERS
Winter storms are called “deceptive killers” by the National Weather Service (NWS). Many deaths from winter storms are the result of people being trapped out in the cold, carbon monoxide poisoning or vehicle accidents.

STAY INFORMED
Unlike tornadoes or thunderstorms that can pop up in a matter of minutes, winter storms usually provide us with days to prepare. Advisories, watches and warnings are issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the NWS. Keep up with weather information through your weather radio, local TV news and smartphone alerts.

HAVE A PLAN
Winter storms don’t always affect us at the most convenient time. You may be at work or your kids may be at school when the weather begins to deteriorate. Develop a plan with all members of your family for how to handle the winter weather, and for staying in close contact with one another. Your phone battery may die, so keep a written list of numbers and prepare alternative ways to communicate.
WIND CHILL
Wind chill is the cooling effect of wind on exposed skin. The wind chill factor is what your body feels the temperature is, not the actual temperature. Your body’s temperature cools as the wind removes the heat surrounding it. Knowing the wind chill factor can help you determine how long it will take before your exposed skin is susceptible to frostbite.

LEARN THE LINGO
Here are some of the terms used to talk about winter storms and weather. The better you understand what could happen, the better prepared you will be when it does happen.

OUTLOOK – Alerts the public to the possibility of winter storm conditions, typically issued 3-5 days prior to a storm.

WATCH – Alerts the public to the possibility of winter storm conditions, issued 12-48 hours before the storm.

ADVISORY – The winter storm conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences that may be hazardous, but if caution is exercised, they should not become life-threatening.

WARNING – Hazardous weather is occurring or imminent. Warnings are usually issued 12-24 hours prior to a winter storm beginning.
YOUR EMERGENCY KIT

Despite advanced warning, winter storms can arrive before we have time to get home. The roads are where most winter weather fatalities occur, so you may need to stay at your office or school when the storm starts. With this in mind you should have an emergency kit at multiple locations, including your home, office and car.

✅ **WATER** – One gallon per day *per person*, three days’ supply.

✅ **FOOD** – Non-perishable, three days’ supply. Keep additional baby food on hand for infants. Don’t forget pet food and a nonelectric can opener.

✅ **FIRST-AID KIT** – Include common over-the-counter medications and a two-week supply of any prescription medications. Take into consideration any special needs such as oxygen or mobility devices. Also pack moist towelettes, hand sanitizer and toothpaste.

✅ **FLASHLIGHT, RADIO** – Should be hand-cranked with a battery backup. Include additional batteries.

✅ **CELLPHONE CHARGER** – For a car or wall outlet.

✅ **WINTER CLOTHING** – Have gloves, blankets and extra clothes nearby (especially in your car).

✅ **ROCK SALT AND KITTY LITTER/SAND** – Rock salt (ice cream salt also works) can be used to quickly melt ice, and kitty litter/sand can be used to provide traction for your car to get out of an icy spot.
**SAFE AND WARM AT HOME**

- Check that your home’s fire extinguishers are in working order and everyone in the house is trained to use one, because poor road conditions could delay emergency services. Check the batteries in your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Let faucets drip to prevent pipes from freezing, and use foam insulation, newspapers or plastic to insulate exposed pipes. Be prepared to shut off water valves if a pipe bursts.
- Make sure your roof is structurally sound enough to hold the weight of snow or ice.
- Weatherstrip doors and windows or cover them with plastic to prevent drafts, and insulate your walls and attic.
- Trim back any branches that pose a threat to your house or other structures should they fall during the storm.
- Protect your family from fire hazards by cleaning and maintaining your chimneys and heating equipment.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning is more likely in the winter when homes are shut off from ventilation. Install detectors if you don’t already have them.
MOBILE EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT

- Cellphone charger
- First aid kit
- Jumper cables
- Flares
- Full tank of gas
- Tow rope
- Tire chains or snow tires
- Bag of sand or cat litter
- Shovel, ice scraper, snow brush
- Blanket
- Boots, gloves, warm clothes
- Flashlight
- Water, snacks

READY YOUR CAR

Prepare before winter sets in. Do it yourself, or have a mechanic winterize your vehicle.

- Check antifreeze levels.
- Check ignition system and clean battery terminals.
- Brake checkup.
- Air filters and fuel – Use additives to keep water out of your fuel system.
  Keep a full tank of gas to prevent the fuel line from freezing, and in case you get trapped on the road.
- Heater and defroster maintenance.
- Check your headlights/taillights and hazard blinkers.
- Oil – See if your car manufacturer recommends thinner weight oil.
- Check thermostat.
- Check your wipers and wiper fluid.
- Check tire tread to ensure grip. Most winter conditions can be managed with all-weather radials.
STAY OFF THE ROAD
Road conditions are extremely hazardous during and after winter storms. Even if you have experience driving in winter conditions, the drivers around you may not. It is recommended that you avoid using the roads if at all possible during winter storms.

IF YOU MUST DRIVE...
There are a few things you can do to prepare yourself for driving in winter conditions. Keep an emergency supply kit in your car, including additional warm clothing, blankets, water and food. Drive on a full tank of gas in case you become stranded. Travel on main roads that are more likely to be treated for ice, and do so during the day. If you cannot take someone with you, let others know your route and how you can be reached.
IF STRANDED

GO
- If you have winter clothing.
- If outside conditions are safe, and you have visibility.
- If the route will not expose you to weather for extended periods of time.

STAY
- If rescue is likely and to avoid unnecessary exposure.
- If you are not close to a safe location, or one is not visible.
- If you do not have winter clothing.

CARBON MONOXIDE DANGERS

Thousands of Americans get sick each year because of carbon monoxide poisoning. The increase of inappropriately used alternative heating/power sources indoors and poorly maintained gas furnaces are often to blame. You can avoid carbon monoxide poisoning with correct equipment placement, proper maintenance and the use of detectors. Do not place your generator or grill inside or within 20 feet of windows and doors. Keep the batteries in your carbon monoxide detector fresh. Move to a fresh air location immediately, and before calling emergency services, if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.
WINTER WEATHER THREATS
Get medical help as soon as you notice signs of frostbite, as every minute counts. Also check to see if symptoms of hypothermia are present, as both frostbite and hypothermia can result from cold weather exposure. While frostbite can be dangerous, hypothermia can be life-threatening.
FROSTBITE SYMPTOMS
Pale, white appearance in the face, fingers, toes or other extremities accompanied by a loss of feeling.

WHEN IT’S DETECTED – Protect affected skin from further exposure by covering it up. Do not rub the affected skin to warm it. Rubbing could cause further damage to the tissue. Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

HYPOTHERMIA SYMPTOMS
Decrease in body temperature to life-threatening levels, incoherent and disoriented with slurred speech and memory loss. Shivering uncontrollably and exhausted.

WHEN IT’S DETECTED – Remove the victim from the elements and remove any wet clothing. Focus warming efforts on the body’s core by wrapping layers around the person. Get medical assistance immediately if the victim’s temperature drops below 95 degrees.

DRESS FOR THE WINTER
- Prevent loss of body heat by covering all exposed areas of your body. Wear an insulated hat and wrap a scarf around your neck and mouth. Choose mittens over gloves.
- Dress in layers. Multiple loose-fitting and lightweight layers are better than one layer of heavy clothing.
- Your outer layers should keep you dry and safe from wind by being water-repellent and tightly woven.
STAYING SAFE IF THE POWER GOES OUT

Ice and snow add weight to power lines and trees, and can cause tree limbs to come in contact with the lines, resulting in outages. Here’s how you can prepare for a winter power outage:

• Keep an emergency supply kit with food, water and warm clothing/blankets.
• Keep a supply of dry wood if you have a safe fireplace available.
• Avoid opening freezers or refrigerators. Food can stay frozen in a fully loaded freezer for two to three days if the door is closed and properly sealed. In a half-full freezer the food will keep for 24 hours.
• Do not use generators indoors. Plug appliances directly into your electric generator. Never plug a generator into your home’s electrical wiring.
• Leave a light turned on to tell you when power is restored.

*Alabama Power employees are focused on restoring electric service as quickly and as safely as possible when bad weather strikes.*
REPORTING AN OUTAGE: Call our automated outage reporting line at 1-800-888-2726. It is the fastest way to report an outage, any time of the day or night. Customers can also report outages online via their computers or compatible mobile devices.

SAFETY INFORMATION: View tips about how to stay safe before, during and after the storm.

SOCIAL MEDIA: We will send periodic updates about storm-related outages, safety tips and other useful information via Twitter and Facebook.

USEFUL LINKS

www.alabamapower.com


http://www.readyalabama.gov

http://www.ema.alabama.gov

http://www.noaa.gov

http://www.redcross.org

www.fema.gov