

## JOINT NEWS RELEASE

Dane County Emergency Management and

Public Health - Madison & Dane County

(PHMDC)

### Bitterly Cold Weather Raises Health and Safety Concerns

#### Information and Tips on How to Stay Safe

Madison WI – January 5, 2015 - It is expected that the National Weather Service will be issuing another wind chill advisory on Tuesday January 6<sup>th</sup> for another round of frigid air. The wind chill temperature is a measure of how the cold actually feels on your skin. Temperatures and wind chills this low cross the line from discomfort to genuinely life threatening. Public Health-Madison and Dane County and Dane County Emergency Management strongly urge people to be alert and aware of these dangerous conditions.

What may be a minor inconvenience under normal temperatures can rapidly accelerate into a dangerous situation under these temperatures. Under normal winter conditions, a ten minute walk from a car in the ditch would be inconvenient. That same walk under the predicted extreme conditions may cause frostbite and hypothermia.

Signs and symptoms of frostbite include the loss of feeling and color in parts of the body. Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, feelings of numbness, drowsiness, exhaustion, confusion, memory lapses, slow or slurred speech, slow breathing and pulse rates, failing eyesight, poor coordination and possible unconsciousness. If you are experiencing these symptoms, you should seek immediate emergency medical assistance.

If you have to be outside:

- Ensure that someone inside knows your schedule and location. Follow up with that person when you arrive at your destination.
- Identify who you will contact in case of an emergency and make sure they are available to (send) help. Your reaction time to request assistance is critical at these temperatures; do not delay in asking for help.
- Have tow truck numbers programmed into your cell phone so you don't waste valuable time trying to find a towing company to call.

Cold Weather Precautions:

- **Check on loved ones and neighbors, especially those in fragile health, preferably by telephone. Pay particular attention to older neighbors who may be outdoors attempting to shovel snow or engaged in some other activity. Try to talk them into stopping and going back indoors.**
- If you have to go outside, wear appropriate clothing that will adequately insulate you from the cold and provide protection from the wind making sure to expose as little skin as possible to the air.
- Monitor your food intake and physical output and maintain a regular diet to help your body better handle the severe weather conditions.
- Hydrate - Water is usually the best choice.

Drinks with caffeine, sugar and alcohol take longer for your body to absorb and do not hydrate as well. People should be aware of the amount and intensity of their physical activity, both indoors and out. Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts additional strain on the body, especially the heart.

- Older adults, those in fragile health and smaller children can be more readily affected by the cold than the average adult.
- Never leave children or pets alone in vehicles. Temperatures in vehicles can drop rapidly.
- Pets can be greatly affected by the cold and should not be exposed longer than they have to be.
- Large animals need to be kept out of the wind and have a dry place to lie down. Water supplies should be checked to avoid freezing and diets should be adjusted to increase energy (calorie) content by 5%.
- Check heating units. Poorly operating or damaged heating units can release carbon monoxide gas. Test carbon monoxide detectors for proper operation and battery life.

**Carbon monoxide** is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that kills more than 500 Americans every year. Never use generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, and garage or near a window. Also, make sure you have installed a carbon monoxide detector in your home to alert you and your family to this "silent killer."

For additional information regarding winter weather, visit the National Weather Service's Milwaukee / Sullivan Forecast Office at: <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/mkx/>

For shelter and warming center information, see the attached Dane County Human Services shelter schedule.

For updates and additional information on resources due to extreme weather please call 211 or visit [www.danecountyhomeless.org](http://www.danecountyhomeless.org)

For additional information on winter weather health and safety guidance, visit the CDC page "Extreme Cold: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety" at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>

Energy Services information can be found at <http://www.mge.com/customer-service/billing/energy-assistance/>

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