



# CONSUMER NEWS

## Office of Consumer Affairs

**For Immediate Release December 2, 2011**

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### Winterizing Your Car, House, Pets and Yourself

You know its coming...it does every year. Winter is almost here and temperatures are starting to dip. It is time to prepare for the upcoming snow and cold weather season.



#### Winter Car Safety

- Keep the gas tank near full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Replace the wiper blades if they are dry and cracked, and keep the washer fluid filled.
- Inspect your tires for uneven wear which can cause poor traction. Make sure your spare tire is in good condition and properly inflated.
- Have your battery tested, and make sure the cables are clean and free of corrosion, cracks and dirt.
- Check or have a mechanic check out your vehicle. Make sure to use oil recommended by the manufacturer in your car owner manual. In colder weather oil congeals and does not lubricate as well. Check hoses and belts for cracks, soft spots or bulges. If you see a problem, have the hose or belt replaced. And, be certain to have enough antifreeze.
- Let the car fully warm up. Remember, revving the engine excessively when it is cold won't warm it up any faster than just letting it idle normally.
- Carry a winter safety kit which includes battery jumper cables, flashlight with extra batteries, first aid kit, blanket, warm clothing, basic tool kit, safety flares, bottled water and non-perishable food, ice scraper, shovel, and a bag of sand or kitty litter to give needed traction.

#### Winterizing Yourself

- Stock up on your medications so that you do not run out during a severe winter storm. Check with your doctor to see if you should get a flu shot.
- Take care of your health. Watch that you do not gain weight due to overeating the wrong foods. Eat a healthy diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. Have an exercise routine and get plenty of rest.
- Dress appropriately for the weather; protect your head and ears, wear cold-weather socks and boots that offer traction. Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs. Wear layers, as they provide better insulation and warmth.
- Protect yourself when shoveling snow by bending your knees, taking frequent breaks and using a small to medium lightweight shovel.
- Beat the winter blues. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of winter depression which affects millions of people every winter, especially during December, January and February. If you think that you may suffer from SAD, try to get out in the daylight for a while each day. If possible get some winter sun. Get out and socialize.
- Be prepared to be snowed in; stock your pantry with plenty of water and food that does not need to be cooked in case of a power outage, and have a few books, videos or board games on hand to keep yourself and children occupied while you ride out the storm.

## Winterizing Your Home

- Clean out gutters and use a hose to spray water down the downspouts to clear debris.
- Turn off outside water lines and open the outside spigots to drain standing water from pipes, know how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts and insulate water pipes to avoid freezing.
- Have an inspection of your furnace. Stock up on furnace filters and change them monthly.
- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned to ensure no obstructions. Install a chimney cap which can prevent water damage and keep animals out. Before lighting a fire make sure the flue is open and burn only dry seasoned wood to help cut down on creosote buildup which can clog flues. (see Chimney Sweep and Repair Tips Factsheet on our website)
- Inspect your home's exterior for crevice cracks and exposed entry points around pipes; seal them. To prevent cold air from entering your home - use weatherstripping around doors, caulk windows and cover them with plastic. If you have storm windows, install them. Adding extra insulation to the attic will prevent warm air from creeping to your roof and causing ice dams.
- Stock up on indoor candles and matches or lighters for use during a power shortage. Be sure to have a portable radio, hand crank can opener, batteries, and a flashlight on hand.
- Keep snow shovels and other snow removal equipment, rock salt or ammonium nitrate on hand to keep drives and walkways clear.



## Winter Safety for Pets

- Make sure all of your pets wear collars with your current contact information on identification tags; if your pet is lost, a current tag will help return your pet faster.
- Most outdoor pets need to be brought inside when the weather turns really cold. If you have to take them out, stay with them. If you absolutely must leave them outside for a significant length of time, make sure they have a warm, solid shelter against the wind and thick bedding. Outdoor pets should also be given additional food for extra energy.
- Make sure that all animals have access to clean, fresh water that is not frozen.
- If you walk your dog on sidewalks that have been treated with de-icer, make sure to wash the dog's paws when you get home as these chemicals can irritate the skin or cause an inflammation of the digestive tract if your pet licks its paws.
- Keep pets away from antifreeze solution, and promptly clean up any antifreeze spills. Antifreeze is attractive to pets but is deadly, even in very small amounts.
- Be cautious if your cat likes being outside. Cats that are left outdoors may crawl into a warm car engine to get warm, which can kill them. It's much safer to keep your cat indoors during the winter.
- Dogs with long fur on the bottom of their paws often develop ice balls between the pads and toes of the feet. To prevent ice balls from forming, trim the hair around your dog's feet. Apply a small amount of Vaseline, cooking oil, or PAM spray to your dog's feet before taking him for a walk in snow. The oil helps prevent ice balls from sticking. Make sure you use edible oil; most dogs will lick their paws after you apply the oil, or consider having your dog wear boots.

For more information on other consumer issues,  
please contact the  
Office of Consumer Affairs at  
330-643-2879, or visit our website at  
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