

Winter is Coming! Are you Ready?

The Texas summer is over and it's time to shift your focus to prepare for colder weather. TAC Risk Management Pool (TAC RMP) has tips to help you prepare for winter, protect your employees, and avoid property and vehicle damage.

The Three P's of Winter – People, Pipes & Property, and Preparedness

People

Employees are our most valuable resource. To prevent slips, trips, and falls during this winter season, clear walking surfaces of snow and ice, and spread deicer, as quickly as possible after a winter storm. Playground sand or rock salt are readily available and less expensive alternatives to commercial deicer. In addition, the following precautions will help reduce the likelihood of injuries:

- Wear proper footwear! Walking on snow or ice is especially treacherous. A pair of insulated and water resistant boots with good rubber treads is a must for walking during or after a winter storm. Keep a pair of rubber over-shoes with good treads that fit over your street shoes close by during the winter months.
- Take short steps and walk at a slower pace so you can react quickly to a change in traction when walking on an icy or snow-covered walkway.
- Select properly-sized ladders for the job, ensure they're well maintained and setup correctly when clearing ice and snow from roofs and low hanging tree limbs.
- Remove icicles that form in high traffic areas
- Watch for low hanging or damaged power lines due to ice and/or snow build up.

Vehicle collisions are the number one cause of workplace fatalities. Winter driving can increase the hazards your vehicle operators face. Here are some precautions employees should take to reduce winter road hazards:

- Plan your route, even for short distances; and be aware of weather and road conditions.
- Carry a safety kit in your vehicle for emergencies - flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material (sand, kitty litter, even floor mats), shovel, snow brush and ice scraper, warning signs or devices (like flares, LED lights) and blankets.
- Perform a pre-trip vehicle inspection prior to departure.
- Always buckle up!
- Be familiar with and know how to react to cold weather driving hazards – black ice, snow, rain, poor lighting conditions.
- Always steer into a skid to avoid losing control.
- Be aware of increased stopping distances on snow and ice.
- Know what your brakes will do: stomp on antilock brakes, pump non-antilock brakes.
- Slow down and increase distances between cars.
- Keep your eyes open for pedestrians walking in the road.

Vehicles and other motorized equipment need special care in the winter. Most vehicle batteries deteriorate over time and need to be checked to ensure safe operation and reliability. Battery replacement should be included in the preventive maintenance schedule. Vehicle fuel tanks and above-ground fuel storage tanks also require special attention when temperatures drop. Water condensation can occur during a temperature drop leading to fuel contamination that could damage vehicles and other equipment. Vehicles and heavy equipment should be checked prior to operation. Follow these simple tips to ensure that vehicles provide safe and reliable operation:

- Check that all fluids are at the manufacturer's recommended levels before operation – fuel, oil, brake, cooling system. Use the manufacturer's recommendation for anti-freeze in vehicle's cooling system. Tap water is not recommended for either temperature extremes
- Ensure brakes are operating properly.
- Tires should be checked for proper tread depth, signs of damage or uneven wear and proper tire inflation.

- Inspect all exterior lights
- Check wipers and window defrosters, if equipped.

Pipes & Property

Frozen pipes are the number one risk for buildings when the temperature drops. Though you may think that shutting down the heat to your buildings during weekends and holidays will save the county money, there's a risk of frozen pipes due to a sudden or prolonged cold spell. Depending on the age or weatherization of your buildings, this risk could greatly increase. The following precautions could protect your buildings during freezing and other winter temperature conditions:

- Establish regular security checks of closed buildings and monitor for heating, water, and power issues before these lead to bigger problems.
- Do not let your buildings' interior temperatures drop below 45 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Open the doors to sink cabinets and other areas with water pipes to allow warm air to circulate.
- Insulate and/or wrap all exterior pipes and faucets.
- Inspect fire sprinkler systems especially those that use anti-freeze to protect pipes from freezing. The anti-freeze solution deteriorates over time and needs to be checked to ensure continual protection.
- Boilers should not be shut down to avoid damage to the system and ensure proper operation.
- Some fire alarm and security systems can remotely monitor building conditions and detect water leaks; consider using these features if available.
- Stay on schedule with maintenance requests for leaky doors, windows, and cracks.
- Keep at least three feet of space around heat-producing equipment. i.e. – furnaces & space heaters.
- Only use space heaters with safety features i.e.: tip over protection, timer, overheating shut off.
- Clean leaves, snow, and ice from roofs and gutters quickly.
- Use and test backup electricity supplies.

Preparedness

Be Prepared for Inclement Winter Weather! Preparing for winter should also include emergency planning. Essential and non-essential staff need to be weather aware and should be familiar with established emergency procedures and notification protocols. Some operations within your county will continue to operate for public safety reasons. Your staff should know the emergency contacts within your organization in the event they need to report a problem.

Severe winter weather conditions may require cancellation of events or building closures. Your county should have an established procedures to alert employees and the general public of closures, cancellations, and other important weather related information.

If you have any specific questions or would like additional information to help you prepare for winter, please contact your Risk Control Consultant. You can find a link to your consultant team by clicking [here](#). With a little planning and preparation, you can let the worry of winter come and go!