

Thornton Fire Department offers winter safety tips

As the cold and snow of winter continues across the metro area, the Thornton Fire Department would like to offer some safety tips:

SNOW MOUNDS

During and after snowstorms you will often see mounds of snow. These mounds of snow should be left alone. Children tend to want to climb the mound however by doing this they are putting themselves at risk to fall to the ground, or into the road. Children should not sled down these snow mounds. Drivers should be cognizant of any activity around all snow mounds.

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS

Space heaters need their space! Keep combustibles at least three feet away from each heater. When buying a heater, look for a thermostat control mechanism and a switch that automatically shuts off the power if the heater falls over. Heaters are not dryers or tables! Don't dry or store objects on top of your heater.

CANDLES

Always put candles in non-tip candleholders before you light them, and do not burn candles near decorations or displays. Keep candles well away from curtains, and never put candles in windows or near exits. Never leave a room with a candle burning or within reach of small children.

SLIPS AND FALLS

Wear rubber-soled shoes or boots with good traction. Avoid wearing leather soles or high heels shoes. Take short steps with you feet pointed slightly outward. This will help keep your center of balance under you and provide a stable base for support. Pay attention to your walking surface and beware of black ice. Don't take shortcuts. Always use sidewalks, steps, ramps, and the cleared paths in parking lots. Carry only those items necessary. Carrying weighted or bulky packages increases your chances of falling.

HYPOTHERMIA: LOW BODY TEMPERATURE

Winter not only brings snow, but also cold weather. Remember to dress appropriately, bundle up, but don't overdue it. If you are going to be indoors, open up your coat to avoid overheating yourself. Warning signs include uncontrolled shivering, memory loss, disorientation, slurred speech, and apparent exhaustion. If you can, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95 degrees F, immediately seek medical attention. If medical care is not available, begin warming the person slowly. Remove wet clothing, and wrap warm blankets between legs and under arms to start. Warm the body core first. If needed use your own body heat to help. Get the person into dry clothing, and wrap them in a warm blanket covering the head and neck. Do not give the person alcohol, drugs, coffee, or any HOT beverage or food; warm broth is better. Do not warm extremities (arms and legs) first! This drives the cold blood toward the heart and can lead to heart failure.

SNOW SHOVELING

Dress warmly, paying special attention to feet, hands, nose and ears. Avoid shoveling if you are out of shape or if you have a history of heart trouble. If you have to shovel your walks, try not to over do it. If you feel yourself getting tired and weak, it's time to go inside and take a break. If possible, push snow in front of you. If you have to lift it, pick up small amounts and lift with your legs bent, not your back. Do not toss snow over your shoulder or to the side.

SNOW BLOWING

Dress warmly, paying special attention to feet, hands, nose and ears. Make sure you understand your owners manual safety procedures thoroughly. Be sure you have good visibility or light. Clear the area that you are going to blow snow from of all obstacles that can clog the chute. Never put your hand in the snow blower to remove snow or debris, instead turn it off and disconnect the sparkplug, then use a stick or broom handle. Never leave the snow blower unattended. Don't attempt to clear steep slopes.

"WINTER STORMS... The Deceptive Killers"

Every year winter storms and below zero temperatures give rise to weather-related emergencies. Winter storms are considered deceptive killers because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Everyone is potentially at risk; however the actual threat to you depends on your specific situation. Avoid overexertion, such as shoveling heavy snow, pushing a car, or walking in deep snow. The strain from the cold and the hard labor may cause a heart attack. Sweating could lead to a chill and hypothermia. The cold weather can present serious problems. A little careful planning, preparedness and common sense can help prevent many of these problems and make your winter a lot safer.

DRESS TO FIT THE SEASON

Wear loose-fitting, light-weight, warm clothing in several layers. Trapped air insulates. Layers can be removed to avoid perspiration and subsequent chill. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent, and hooded. Wear a hat. Half your body heat loss can be from the head. Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from extreme cold. Mittens, snug at the wrist, are better than gloves. Try to stay dry.

EXTREME COLD

Extreme cold often accompanies a winter storm or is left in its wake. Prolonged exposure to the cold can cause frostbite or hypothermia and become life-threatening. Infants and elderly people are most susceptible. Pipes may freeze and burst in homes that are poorly insulated or without heat. If your pipes freeze this winter, **DO NOT** use a propane torch to thaw them out! You could set your home on fire by accident! Thaw them out slowly, a hand held hair dryer works best.

FROSTBITE

Frostbite is damage to body tissue caused by that tissue being frozen. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, or the tip of your nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately! If you must wait for help, slowly rewarm affected areas. If the person is showing signs of hypothermia, however, warm the body core before the extremities.

WHEN CAUGHT IN A WINTER STORM...

- Stay in your car or truck
- Disorientation occurs quickly in wind-driven snow and cold
- Run the motor about ten minutes each hour for heat
- Open the window a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning
- Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked
- Make yourself visible to rescuers
- Turn on the dome light at night when running the engine
- Tie a colored cloth (preferably red) to your antenna or door
- Raise the hood indicating trouble after snow stops falling
- Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers, and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm

BE PREPARED BEFORE THE STORM STRIKES

Plan your travel and check the latest weather reports to avoid the storm! If local authorities recommend you to stay off the road, take their advice. Don't go unless you really have to go. Allow extra time to get to your destinations. Reduce speed and drive with extra caution. Don't pass plow trucks. Avoid sudden braking, stopping or turning. Allow extra space between your vehicle and the vehicles in front of you. Before winter have your vehicle serviced to check for proper tires, tire pressure, fluid levels etc. Maintain a full tank of gas, never let your tank go below half anytime during the winter.

Carry a WINTER STORM SURVIVAL KIT

- Blankets/sleeping bags
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Knife
- high-calorie non perishable food

- Extra clothing to keep dry
- Bag of sand or kitty litter
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Compass and road maps
- Booster cables

THIN ICE

There is an attraction to ice on ponds and lakes during the winter months. It is fun to walk on, run and slide across and to go snowmobiling on. Unfortunately, the risks are underestimated. If you see someone who has fallen through the ice, DO NOT WALK out to them, you may become another victim. Call 911 for help and wait for them to arrive.

POWER LINES DOWNED

Another common winter hazard is power lines being downed due to ice storms or high winds. Wires should always be considered LIVE AND DANGEROUS and must be avoided. Please notify the Fire Department and the electric company immediately, and it will be handled from there.

CHECKING ON A NEIGHBOR

It is also a nice gesture to check on the elderly person living next door during the winter and summer months. Just to make sure they have everything and they are not in any kind of difficulty. Just knowing someone is out there helps.

FIREPLACES

Keep fire where it belongs - in the fireplace! Make sure you have a screen large enough to catch flying sparks and rolling logs. Clean your chimney regularly - creosote build-up can ignite your chimney, roof and the whole house! Have your chimney inspected annually for damage and obstructions. Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container. Cardboard boxes and paper bags can quickly catch fire. Only burn materials appropriate for a fireplace, never burn trash or paper, burning paper can float up a chimney and onto your roof or into your yard.

FURNACES

Furnaces should have regular maintenance to operate properly. Annual cleaning, inspection are recommended. As mentioned before, have your chimney inspected and cleaned annually. Don't use the oven for heating!

STORMS WITH STRONG WINDS

Sometimes winter storms are accompanied by strong winds creating blizzard conditions with blinding wind-driven snow, severe drifting, and dangerous wind chill. Strong winds and ice storms can knock down trees, utility poles, and power lines. Communications and power can be disrupted for days while utility companies work to repair the extensive damage. Even small accumulations of ice may cause extreme hazards to motorists and pedestrians.

HEAVY SNOW STORMS

Heavy snow can immobilize a region and paralyze a city, stranding commuters, stopping the flow of supplies, and disrupting emergency and medical services. Accumulations of snow can collapse buildings and knock down trees and power lines. The cost of snow removal, repairing damages and loss of business can have large economic impacts on cities and towns.

SLEET AND FREEZING RAIN

Rain drops that freeze into ice pellets before reaching the ground constitute sleet. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects. However, it can accumulate like snow and cause a hazard to motorists. Rain that falls onto a surface with a temperature below freezing causes it to freeze to surfaces, such as tires, cars and roads, forming a coating or glaze of ice. Even small accumulations of ice can cause a significant hazard.

WIND CHILL

Wind chill is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin caused by combined effects of wind and cold. As the wind increases, heat is carried away from the body at an accelerated rate, driving down the body temperature. Be aware that animals are also affected by wind chill.

For more information on winter safety call Thornton Fire Public Education Officer at 303-538-7602.