

# All Ready?

Emergencies Happen. Prepare Today.

NEWSLETTER

February / 17 / 2014  
Winter Edition



## Winter Weather Chills and Thrills

In early January, St. Louis area residents were among the 187 million people to experience the kind of cold that is typically associated with decidedly arctic conditions. A low-pressure cold air jet stream that meteorologists called the "[polar vortex](#)" swooped into the area and brought lows of -13 degrees Fahrenheit to the St. Louis area. The worst of the winter weather seemed to hover in the [St. Louis area around January 6](#), when temperatures reached a high of two degrees and area residents were advised to stay warm and safe in their homes. The surrounding area was buried under 10.8 inches of snow and an icy wind blew through the region. And that was just the beginning...

If our [friends in the southern states](#) are any indication of what can happen when you aren't prepared for severe weather conditions, then there should be no doubt that action must be taken to prepare for any weather event. And with several weeks of frosty weather left, further action may be needed to battle the winter chill.

Putting together an [emergency kit for your car](#) is simple to compile, but it can make a world of difference when you are stuck in a sudden storm. Weather can change in a moment. When temperatures plummet and a cold day turns dangerous, you can protect yourself and your family by being prepared and [knowing what to do to stay safe](#).

## In This Edition

[Winter Weather Chills and Thrills](#)

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[Did you know...? Winter Car Issues](#)

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[Lend a Helping Hand](#)

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[Winter Seasonal Overview](#)

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## Did you know...?

Cars have a much harder time starting when it's cold outside. Many people mistake a car's reaction to the cold for a serious problem under the hood. Before you call AAA the next time your car doesn't start, try these simple steps first:

1. **Coax the engine.** Before you start your car and while it is still in "park", gently push on the gas pedal once and then release. This allows a small amount of fuel into the intake which will help warm up the starting process.
2. **Shut the car's doors and turn all accessories off.** This includes the heater, radio and lights. When you park your car for the night, make sure you take the time to shut off all these features as this will help maximize your car battery's starting power.
3. **Turn the key all the way and hold it for 20 seconds.** This will help get the engine going. However, do NOT hold for longer than 20 seconds as overworking the starter can cause mechanical damage.
4. **Let the battery recover if the car does not start after 20 seconds.** Wait a couple of minutes before attempting to start the engine again. This gives the battery time to recover and allows the starter motor to cool down. Ultimately, you are trying to heat up your battery which has been exposed to freezing temperatures.

While this system is not fail-proof and takes some trial and error, it is good to know that preventive steps can be taken to keep your car safe and running smoothly. Take the necessary steps to check your car battery frequently, as batteries that are older than three years pose a risk in extremely cold weather.

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## Lend a Helping (Mitten-Covered) Hand

Those living with disabilities in your area may need assistance with everyday tasks, such as getting groceries and clearing their walkways. Check in on elderly friends and neighbors and offer to clear paths to their cars and keep the sidewalk around your home clear for easy access. Being proactive about sidewalk safety will make a significant difference to someone in your neighborhood and it can [help prevent serious injuries](#).

### Prevent a fall:

- Stay inside - make arrangements for someone to shovel and salt driveways and walkways. Professional caregivers can assist with to-do items, such as bringing in the mail and/or picking up groceries.
- Wear shoes or boots with a non-skid sole.
- Have handrails installed on outside walls for frequently used walkways.
- If you use a cane or walker, check the rubber tips to make sure they are not worn smooth. Also, store them in a warm, dry place as ice can form on cold metal and reduce friction.

### Build a network:

- Stay in touch in with family, friends and neighbors. Schedule regular check-in calls or enlist the help of a professional caregiver to come in for an hour a week to assist with groceries, medication or daily chores.

- Make arrangements for assistance in case of a blizzard or power outage. Keep important numbers in an emergency kit, along with non-perishable foods, water and medications.
- Be familiar with your local resources. Visit [www.allreadystl.com](http://www.allreadystl.com) for more information about St. Louis area organizations and resources.

There are several groups in your community who may need assistance with employing these cold weather tips. Spend a few moments checking in on elderly neighbors or those living with disabilities to make sure they have all the resources they need to survive this winter weather.

### **The disabled or chronically ill**



## Seasonal Overview

### Winterizing Your Home

While preparing yourself and your family, don't ignore your home and property! By making a few adjustments around the house, you can keep your family safe and save on your electric bills.



- **Reverse that fan:** Reversing your ceiling fan is a small tip that is often overlooked. By reversing its direction from the summer operation, the fan will push warm air downward and force it to recirculate, keeping you more comfortable. (Here's how you know the fan is winter-ready: As you look up, the blades should be turning clockwise!)
- **Clean out your gutters:** Autumn leaves that fell into your gutter could have clogged the draining system. Before the next round of snow, be sure the gutters are clear so that accumulating ice and snow can properly drain away from your house as they melt. Clogged drains can form ice dams, in which water backs up, freezes and causes water to seep into the house or break your gutter altogether.
- **Keep that cold air out:** Drafts in your house can waste five to 30 percent of your energy use during winter months. By placing a rolled bath towel under a drafty door or window sill, you can save on your electric bill and keep your house warm in a more natural way.
- **Turn down your water heater:** Many heaters are set to 140 degrees Fahrenheit, which is unnecessarily high. By lowering your water heater temperature to 120 degrees, you can reduce your heating costs by six to 10 percent.
- **De-icing:** There are other ways besides spreading salt to help ensure sidewalks and driveways are safe to walk on. There are [several environmentally-friendly alternatives to salt](#), such as beet juice, alfalfa meal and urea.
- **Temperature control:** Keep the thermostat at 65 degrees, at least. Consistently check to make sure your home is sufficiently warm in all areas. Even as heating costs rise, your safety should be a priority.
- **Prevent heating emergencies:** Install a carbon monoxide detector near where you and your children sleep. Also check that fireplaces and furnaces are cleaned and in good working order. Furnace filters should be replaced monthly to prevent possible fires.

We all want to make sure our homes stay warm during the bitter cold, but use caution when handling space heaters. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, incorrect home heating practices and the misuse of heating equipment leads to an estimated [50,000 residential fires](#) each year.

If keeping your home heated is a challenge, there are many local places in the St. Louis area that can provide a warm respite:

- **United Way of Greater St. Louis:** Call United Way 2-1-1 to get connected to services in the St. Louis area that address many winter needs, including warming centers during weather emergencies.
- **American Red Cross:** This group works to provide compassionate care for people in need including a warming shelter in the St. Louis area. They can also help you

- connect with organizations that provide emergency fuel assistance.
- [Heat up St. Louis](#): This organization works to identify locations in the St. Louis metropolitan area that have agreed to open their doors for individuals to seek shelter from excessive cold conditions.
- Find a warming shelter in [Missouri](#) or [Illinois](#).

### **Getting Winter Smart about Your Car**

If you frequently commute in freezing temperatures or hazardous conditions, consider checking these items off your "emergency preparedness" list before heading out the door:

- **Fill up your tank.** This will help keep the gas line from freezing and prevent your car from stalling during severe weather.
- **Store extra blankets.** Keep blankets and warm clothes in your vehicle in case you are stalled in traffic or your car breaks down and you need to wait for assistance. Remember, the risk of frostbite increases after only 15 minutes in open air.
- **Stock up on sand.** As we've reported previously, rock salt is great for preventing ice and snow on your sidewalk and driveway, but can be a hazard for your pets or service animals if they ingest it (from licking their paws). Stock up on bags of sand or kitty litter to ensure that your walkways are clear and your car is free to move.
- **Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.** If you are trapped in your car but it has the ability to start, run your engine for 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. Do not run it full time, as this will waste your battery and could increase your risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- **Pack your pills.** Store emergency prescriptions or medical equipment that you and your family need in your home and car. If you require these medications daily, be sure you have enough for an entire week in case the pharmacy is unavailable.
- **Prepare for pets or service animals.** If you often travel with pets or service animals, don't forget to keep them safe by keeping a supply of food or treats, extra bottled water, any pet medication and a carrier case in your car for easy accessibility.
- **Know the limits.** If you are disabled and rely on food to be delivered to you by others, know that sometimes sudden storms can prevent this service. Store non-perishable food items stocked in your house so you could eat for several days. Also, keep an eye on the road conditions, even if you don't drive, so you will know if the roads are safe enough for your food delivery to come.

### **Preparing Your Cold Weather Safety Kit**

Whether it is in your home or in your car, there are several must-have essentials for your winter emergency kits:

1. **Duct tape:** Use it for on-the-fly repairs and temporary fixes.
2. **Blanket:** Mylar is warm and lightweight, and can fit in a small space.
3. **Radio/phone charger:** A hand crank will allow you to juice up the battery.
4. **Work gloves:** Leather grips protect your mitts during post-storm cleanup.
5. **Lantern:** A battery-operated model is safer than candles.
6. **Baby wipes:** They'll remove grime from your hands and practically any surface.

Collect all your gear in a waterproof plastic tub and store it in an easy-to-access spot in your house, car and/or workplace.

Also, it is important to update items from your year-round emergency kit. Make sure to include first-aid supplies, three days' worth of bottled water, nonperishable food and a list of important phone numbers.

### **Combating the Cold**

A few simple tips and tricks can help you fight off the bitter cold during your morning

commute or while you shovel your walkway for a friend or neighbor.

- Stay warm and dry. Hypothermia is a very real concern, especially among the elderly and children. It can lead to other illnesses, such as pneumonia, kidney failure and heart problems.
- The elderly have an impaired ability to increase heat production and children have limited energy reserves, which make them extra vulnerable to the cold.
- Learn to recognize symptoms of hypothermia: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness. If you notice any of these signs, seek immediate medical attention.
- Consider investing in some winter-ready clothing made out of synthetic material like polyester or fiber that has "[wicking](#)" power. This means the fibers will wick (move) moisture away from your skin and pass it through the fabric so it will evaporate. This will ensure that you remain warm, dry and comfortable. Dress in multiple layers of loose fitting clothing to retain body heat, and make sure your head and extremities are covered.
- Hypothermia can occur in [animals](#), too! While difficult to recognize the signs, pets will become pale and start shivering strongly. This can be followed by listlessness to the point of lethargy and frostbite of certain body parts, such as the tail, tips of the ears and foot pads.

By following these safety tips this winter, you will create a safe environment for yourself, your family and your friends. Stay safe this winter and remember to be All Ready at a moment's notice!

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## All Ready

All Ready is an emergency preparedness initiative designed to help the St. Louis region better anticipate and prepare for emergencies through the individual preparedness efforts of residents. This effort combines resources from emergency preparedness experts around the region and nation in a single place to make preparing for emergencies simple. Through All Ready, residents can learn about and implement the three simple steps to emergency preparedness: 1) Make a plan. 2) Get a kit. 3) Be informed. Learn more at [AllReadySTL.com](http://AllReadySTL.com).

Not on our mailing list? Contact us at [allreadySTL@gmail.com](mailto:allreadySTL@gmail.com) to subscribe.

Want to share All Ready updates with family and friends? Feel free to forward by clicking the link below to share updates on emergency preparedness information and activities in the St. Louis area.

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