

## Winter Storm Tips: roof collapses, power outages and road safety

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### WINTER STORM TIPS

(Thanks to the MA Department of Public Safety for this information)

The series of storms Massachusetts has been receiving continue to present a variety of challenges. Following are a number of important helpful tips to consider regarding the dangers of [roof collapses](#), [power outages](#) and [traveling](#).

#### ROOF COLLAPSE

- As the snow on most roofs has frozen, removing any new snow and its additional weight will be very important.
- If not cleared off, snow piled high on roofs can act as a sponge, absorbing any rain, which we might receive, adding additional stress to structures.
- Relatively flat roofs are particularly vulnerable.
- In many other cases, roof ice dams have formed causing water build-up, leading to interior damage.
- Be on the alert for large accumulating snow build-up or snowdrifts.
- If roof snow can be removed or ice dams broken up safely from the ground with the use of a snow rake (available at most hardware stores), do so.
- Avoid working from ladders, as ladder rungs tend to ice up, snow and ice collect on boot soles, and metal ladders and snow rakes conduct electricity if they come into contact with a power line.
- Protective headgear and eye protection is recommended.
- Flat roofs can be shoveled clear, but only if it is determined that the roof is safe to stand upon. Exercise care when on the roof to avoid potentially dangerous falls.
- Flat roof drainage systems should be kept clear to minimize the risk of excess roof ponding in the event of subsequent heavy rainfall or melting.
- Large icicles can form on roof overhangs, but do not necessarily mean ice damming is occurring. Icicles overhanging walkways can be dangerous and should be carefully removed.
- All of the above actions should only be performed by **able-bodied adults**. The snow is heavy, and roofs and other surfaces may be slippery.

#### LOSS OF POWER

- Wet snow can transition to sleet and freezing rain, leading to possible ice buildup on trees and powerlines. This has the potential to cause power outages. The weight of a one-half inch build-up can be enough to snap tree limbs, causing them to fall and bring down power lines disrupting electrical service.
- The use of candles is strongly discouraged.

- Ensure you have a well-stocked Emergency Supply Kit in case you lose power for an extended period. It should include a flashlight, portable radio, extra batteries, non-perishable food, bottled water, first aid kit, prescription drugs, etc.).
- If utilizing an emergency generator, read, understand and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Always operate emergency generators outdoors and away from any open window. Make sure your generator is properly installed and grounded as you may be liable for damage or injury to other people and property that may result from improperly installed or operated equipment.
- Ensure that your Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors are working correctly and have fresh batteries.
- Check your outside fuel and dryer exhaust vents, making sure that they are not obstructed by snow or ice. Never use cooking equipment intended for outside use indoors as a heat source or cooking device. Never use your oven for heat.
- Space heaters need space, so use them in a 3-foot circle of safety, free of anything that catch fire. Space heaters are not designed to replace your central heating system, they are only designed to provide a little extra heat on a temporary basis. So be sure to turn them off when you leave room or go to bed at night.
- If you lose your heat, seal off unused rooms by stuffing towels in the cracks under the doors. At night, cover windows with extra blankets or sheets.
- Let water drip a trickle to prevent pipes from freezing and open cupboards under sinks to let heat circulate around the pipes.
- If pipes freeze, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they are most exposed to the cold.
- Be extra cautious if you go outside to inspect for damage after a storm. Downed or hanging electrical wires can be hidden by snowdrifts, trees or debris, and could be live. Never attempt to touch or move downed lines. Treat a downed wire as a live wire.
- Questions or issues should be directed to Mass 2-1-1.
- Be a Good Neighbor and check on the elderly or infirm who live around you.

## **ROAD SAFETY**

- The public is urged to stay off the roads. Obviously, road conditions will be hazardous to drivers. Additionally, the lower the traffic volume, the easier it will be for cleanup crews to do their jobs and for emergency vehicles to reach people in distress.
- The high snow banks and narrow streets present many dangers, such as cross-traffic pulling out in front of you unexpectedly, and children waiting at school bus stops or playing on snow banks.
- Utilize Public Transportation when possible.
- For those who have to drive, we urge them to drive slowly and, because stopping times will be compromised, to leave a great deal of space between themselves and the vehicle in front of them (at least 4 vehicle lengths).

- Motorists on all state highways and roadways should be aware that State Police will consider the weather conditions when determining what speed is reasonable. In cases of severe inclement weather, the posted speed limit is clearly not a reasonable speed. State Police urge motorists on all state highways and roadways to driver under 40 mph during snow and ice events, and we will consider anyone exceeding that speed limit to have operating at a speed greater than reasonable and, in extreme cases, to be operating negligently, and we will take appropriate enforcement action.
- Likewise, State Police recommends that all truckers and drivers of tractor-trailer units to err on the side of caution and pull off state highways in severe inclement weather. Commercial carriers are urged to plan ahead to make appropriate scheduling changes to keep their own drivers and other motorists safe. In inclement weather certain highway exits and grade inclines are difficult for trucks to navigate safely.
- Drivers should have a cellular phone with them, and if they get into distress, they should call 911 on the cell to be immediately contacted to a State Police Communications Center.
- Drivers should also have a blanket, warm clothing and flashlight with them in the case that they do get stranded and have to wait for emergency responders.
- Drivers who get stranded should stay with their motor vehicles if it is safe to do so (i.e., if the vehicle off to the side of the road in a safe place). Motorists who get stuck in snow banks should be aware of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning if the snow is blocking their tailpipe, and take appropriate action by shutting the engine and opening a window.
- All motorists are reminded to clear snow and ice from their car windows, roofs and license plates. Failure to do so can cause a public safety hazard as snow and ice blows off and strikes other vehicles or hampers drivers' visibility. Drivers who fail to properly clean their cars of snow or ice can be cited for impeded operation, for transporting an unsecured load, or for a license plate violation if snow obscures the license plate. For the same reasons, truckers are reminded to clear snow and ice from their roofs or trailer units.
- Motorists are warned to be extremely vigilant for pedestrians walking on streets made narrow by snow banks, and also to take great care and to go slowly when approaching intersections with limited visibility caused by snow banks.
- If possible help shovel out fire hydrants and storm drains on your street

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