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MEMA Encourages Residents to Stay Safe During Extreme Cold Weather

FRAMINGHAM, MA – Bitter cold temperatures and dangerously cold wind chills are forecast for later this week. Forecasts from the National Weather Service for late Thursday night and early Friday morning include low temperatures between 10° and -5° and wind chill values expected to be cold as -15° to -25° across the interior and -5° to -15° near the coast. While temperatures are expected to warm up by the weekend, extreme cold temperatures and wind chills can be dangerous.

“MEMA urges residents to take precautions during the upcoming extreme cold weather. If you must go outside, dress for the conditions by covering up as much as possible and wear warm layers.” **said Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Kurt Schwartz.** “Please check on your family, friends, or neighbors to make sure they are safe during the extreme cold.”

Prolonged exposure to the cold can lead to serious health issues including frostbite and in extreme cases, hypothermia. Therefore, MEMA urges residents to minimize outside activities during the extreme cold and to follow these safety tips:

- Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing instead of a single heavy layer. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Wear a hat, mittens (not gloves), and sturdy waterproof boots to protect your extremities. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
 - Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes or the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, seek medical help immediately.
 - The warning signs of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. Get the victim to a warm location. If the person’s temperature drops below 95 degrees, seek immediate medical care.
- Have a well-stocked home [Emergency Kit](#) that includes a flashlight, sleeping bag or blanket, portable radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, bottled water and non-perishable food. Add seasonal supplies to your emergency kit such as extra winter clothing and blankets.

- Make sure your car is properly winterized. Keep the gas tank at least half-full. Carry a [Winter Emergency Car Kit](#) including blankets, extra clothing, a flashlight with spare batteries, a can, waterproof matches (to melt snow for drinking water), non-perishable foods, windshields scraper, shovel, sand, towrope, and jumper cables in the trunk.
- Be a good neighbor. Check on family, friends, and neighbors, especially the elderly, those who live alone, those with medical conditions, and those who may need additional assistance.
- Limit outdoor time for your [pets](#). Freezing temperatures are dangerous to animals as well as humans.
- Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of newspapers covered with plastic to keep them from freezing. Allow a trickle of warm water to run from a faucet that is farthest from your water meter or one that has frozen in the past. This will keep the water moving so that it cannot freeze. If pipes freeze, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes or wrap them with towels soaked in hot water, starting where they are most exposed to the cold. A hair dryer, used with caution, works well to thaw pipes.
- Although temperatures may be cold, bodies of water covered in ice are likely unsafe given recent temperature fluctuations. Residents are urged to stay off frozen bodies of water until ice is at least 4” thick.

Ensure you have sufficient heating fuel, as well as alternate emergency heating equipment in case you lose electricity. When utilizing alternate heating sources, such as an emergency generator, your fireplace, wood stove, or space heater, take necessary safety precautions:

- Keep a fire extinguisher handy and ensure everyone knows how to use it properly.
- Never heat your home with a gas stove or oven or charcoal barbecue grill.
- Make sure all heating devices are properly ventilated and always operate a generator outdoors and away from your home. Improper heating devices can lead to dangerous carbon monoxide (CO) buildup in the home. Make sure you test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause flulike illness or death. If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, call 911 immediately, get the victim to fresh air, and open windows.
- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from space heaters. See more [winter heating safety tips](#) from the Department of Fire Services.

If you need information on the location of open warming centers or shelters check with local authorities or call 2-1-1.

For additional information about MEMA and Extreme Cold Safety Tips, visit www.mass.gov/mema/cold.

MEMA is the state agency charged with ensuring the state is prepared to withstand, respond to, and recover from all types of emergencies and disasters, including natural hazards, accidents, deliberate attacks, and technological and infrastructure failures. MEMA's staff of professional planners, communications specialists and operations and support personnel is committed to an all hazards approach to emergency management. By building and sustaining effective partnerships with federal, state and local government agencies, and with the private sector - individuals, families, non-profits and businesses - MEMA ensures the Commonwealth's ability to rapidly recover from large and small disasters by assessing and mitigating threats and hazards, enhancing preparedness, ensuring effective response, and strengthening our capacity

to rebuild and recover. For additional information about MEMA and Emergency Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema.

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