



OREGON OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Communications Toolkit: Winter Storms



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Introduction

The intent of the **Communication Toolkit: Winter Storms** is to assist messaging during and after a winter storm event in Oregon. This toolkit contains information on communications with the media, partners and the public. During an emergency or disaster, the need for timely and accurate information, regarding what happened and what is being done, skyrockets. This toolkit will help coordinate messages.

This toolkit contains templates and suggestions for communications with the public and media. **Areas highlighted in yellow are meant to be edited to your specific agency.**

Messages to the Public

Key Messages

- Drive safely during hazardous conditions.
- Winterize your home and vehicle.
- Heed the advice of emergency officials regarding evacuations.
- Have an emergency plan and kit.
- Opt into emergency notification systems.
- Donate cash (not supplies) only to official non-profits organizations.

Expanded Messages

Preparing for a winter storm

- Know the terms.
 - Winter Weather Advisory: Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, use caution.
 - Winter Storm Watch: Winter storm conditions are possible within the next 36 to 48 hours. People should review winter storm plans, check supplies, and stay informed
 - Winter Storm Warning: Life threatening, severe winter conditions have begun or will begin within 24 hours. Take precautions immediately.
- Drive safely during hazardous conditions. The leading cause of death from a winter storm is vehicle accidents caused by ice and snow. Use these [winter travel tips](#) from ODOT.
 - Allow extra time to get where you're going — travel is going to be slow.
 - Those riding bikes should be extra careful about motorized vehicles, which take longer to stop in the snow, while motorized vehicles must be extra watchful for bikes.
 - Be prepared for delays. Make sure you have water, blankets, and a full tank of gas.
 - Be cautious when driving across bridges in wintery conditions as they are the first to freeze and the last to thaw.
 - Turn off your cruise control, be alert and drive cautiously.
 - Roads that are wet or have fresh snow, packed snow, or ice have varying degrees of traction. Adjust your speed to match road conditions.
 - Increase your distance from vehicles in front of you. Allow about three times as much space as usual.
- Have an emergency kit with necessary supplies for up to 2 weeks.
- Have a family plan with meeting places and multiple communication plans.
 - Designate an out-of-state contact. Local phone lines will likely be bogged down but a long distance call may go through.
 - Text messages may go through easier than a phone call.
- Have a specific plan if you are unable to drive to work.
 - Work from home
 - Public transportation
 - Walk
- Winterize your vehicle.
 - Check levels of antifreeze.
 - Do not let your gas fall below a half tank in case you get stranded in traffic.
 - Install winter tires or keep chains in your vehicle.
- Winterize your home.

- Insulate walls and attics to keep heat in (this will also lower your heating bill).
- Have chimneys and heating equipment inspected before using.
 - If using alternate heat sources for your home, never use burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Keep these devices at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents.
- Know how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts
- Keep snow off the roof or have a contractor check the structural integrity to bear weight

During a winter storm

- Stay indoors unless required to go outside.
 - Walk carefully on icy/snowy walkways.
 - Use rock salt to melt ice.
 - Wear layered dry clothing.
- Bring pets inside.
- Carbon monoxide-related deaths are highest during colder months. These deaths are likely due to increased use of gas-powered furnaces and alternative heating, cooking, and power sources used inappropriately indoors during power outages.
 - Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Locate unit away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors. Keep these devices at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents.
 - Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
 - Install carbon monoxide alarms in central locations on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas and change the batteries every 6 months.
 - If the carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door. Call for help from the fresh air location and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you.
 - For more information check the CDC webpage on [CO poisoning prevention](#).
- Listen to weather and emergency updates on the TV, radio etc.
- Know the signs of frostbite in extremities.
 - Loss of feeling
 - White/pale in appearance
 - Cover affected area and seek medical attention immediately
 - DO NOT RUB
- Know the signs of hypothermia.
 - Uncontrollable shivering.
 - Memory loss/disorientation
 - Drowsiness/exhaustion
 - If body temperature is below 95 seek medical attention immediately
 - Remove wet clothing, wrap in blankets, drink warm non-alcoholic beverages
- Conserve fuel:
 - Keep residence cooler than usual.
 - Cut off heating to unused/rarely used areas.
- If you become trapped in your vehicle:
 - Pull off to a safe location and turn on hazards.

- Remain in your vehicle unless better, clearly visible shelter is nearby.
- Run heater for 10 minutes every hour.
 - While engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.
 - Periodically clear exhaust pipe of snow.
- Eat regularly and drink fluids but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Make sure you are visible to rescuers.
 - Turn on inside light at night.
 - If in a remote area use rocks or tree limbs to spell out SOS or HELP.
- If necessary abandon the vehicle after the blizzard passes.

Press Releases

Templates

MEDIA RELEASE

Date
NR 1

MEDIA CONTACT:

Name

Phone Number

Email

Title

Subtitle (as needed)

Location, Ore – The National Weather Service has issued a Winter Storm Warning for **[affected area]**.

During winter weather **[agency]** reminds everyone to exercise caution while driving. Some key driving reminders include:

- Allow extra time to get where you're going — travel is going to be slow.
- Those riding bikes should be extra careful about motorized vehicles, which take longer to stop in the snow, while motorized vehicles must be extra watchful for bikes.
- Be prepared for delays. Make sure you have water, blankets and a full tank of gas.
- Be cautious when driving across bridges in wintry conditions as they are the first to freeze and the last to thaw.
- Turn off your cruise control; be alert and drive cautiously.
- Roads that are wet or have fresh snow, packed snow, or ice have varying degrees of traction. Adjust your speed to match road conditions.
- Increase your distance from vehicles in front of you. Allow about three times as much space as usual.

Samples

This press release by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was released in December 2013.

Winter is Coming: Be Ready

With winter bearing down on most of the country this week, it's a great time to make sure you're ready for cold weather. Winter can be unpredictable as temperatures drop quickly and snow piles up within hours. Winter is coming, so heed the advice of the *Game of Thrones* and start preparing now.

If you're in the path of a storm, make sure to listen to weather forecasts which can provide you with details of a coming storm and critical information during the storm. In case of a power failure, make sure you have a battery-powered or hand crank radio with extra batteries.

Whenever a period of extreme cold is predicted, make sure your emergency supplies are ready for cold weather. Update your emergency kits with extra blankets and clothes, snow shovels, rock salt to melt icy walkways, and sufficient heating sources. Consider a two-week supply of food and water if you live in a hard to reach area.

In a winter storm, minimize your travel. If you have to travel, keep others informed of your route and time of arrival. Stay on main roads and avoid back road shortcuts. Remember that bridges and overpasses will ice over first. Keep a near full gas tank to prevent your fuel line from freezing, and slow down! You may be the best driver in the world, but ice, snow and other drivers can be unpredictable. If you get stranded, stay in your vehicle. Go [here](#) for more information on what to do if you are stranded in your car.

Limit your time outside. Snow is fun and great to play in, but wear layers and make sure to come inside frequently to warm up and change out of wet clothes. In cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced, eventually using up your body's stored energy. [Hypothermia](#) can be the result of abnormally low body temperature that affects the brain, causing a person to be unable to think clearly or move well. Look for warning signs of shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, slurred speech or drowsiness.

[Frostbite](#) is another cold weather health hazard. Frostbite is an injury to the body caused by freezing, and causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects your extremities, so keep your nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers and toes covered. If you have redness, numbness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold and protect your skin.

Help spread the word about staying safe this winter. Share our [Game of Thrones-inspired eCards](#) or our [Be Ready: Winter Weather infographic](#) to encourage your friends and family to be prepared.

Social Media Messaging

The following are suggested social media engagement tools and can be posted directly or edited to suit your agency's needs. When posting on Twitter and Facebook use the event hashtag, other commonly used hashtags or combinations.

Commonly used hashtags:

#OregonEM
#ORwx
#WinterSafety
#WinterStorm

Videos and Multimedia

It is best to accompany social media posts with photos and videos whenever possible.

Videos:

[When the Sky Turns Gray](#)

Graphics:

[Winter Weather](#)
[Heating Safety](#)

Twitter Messages

The following messages can be posted to your agency's local twitter account. We encourage you to retweet messages from [@OregonOEM](#) and tag OEM in your tweets.

Twitter accounts to watch and retweet:

[@OregonGovBrown](#) – Oregon Governor Kate Brown
[@NWSPortland](#) – Portland National Weather Service
[@NWSPendleton](#) – Pendleton National Weather Service
[@OregonDOT](#) – Oregon Department of Transportation
[@PBOTinfo](#) – Portland Bureau of Transportation
[@RedCrossCasc](#) – American Red Cross Cascades Region

Scripted Tweets

Use ODOT's Tripcheck for the latest road conditions before traveling

<http://www.tripcheck.com/Pages/RCmap.asp>

[@NWSPortland](#) issued a Winter Weather Watch for [area]; make sure your family is prepared
www.ready.gov/winter

Stay safe during winter weather. Monitor weather alerts and have an emergency kit. www.ready.gov/kit

If you must drive, follow these winter driving safety tips

<http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/Pages/winterdriving.aspx>

Keep generators and other gas-burning heating devices outdoors to avoid CO poisoning during winter weather

Don't forget to restock your emergency kit now the storm has passed. Add items you wished you had.

Learn how to stay safe before, during & after winter storms & extreme cold by visiting www.ready.gov/winter

Don't let #WinterStorms freeze your preparedness planning! Be ready ahead of time

Ice and snow, take it slow— slower speed, slower acceleration, slower steering and slower braking. #WinterSafety

Rock salt melts snow and ice, but the chemicals can be fatal to pets. Clean their paws after each trip outside!

Facebook Messages

The following messages can be posted to your agency's local Facebook account. We encourage you to share posts from the [Oregon Office of Emergency Management](#) and tag OEM in your posts.

Facebook Accounts to watch and share:

[US National Weather Service Portland Oregon](#)
[US National Weather Service Pendleton Oregon](#)
[Oregon Department of Transportation](#)
[Portland Bureau of Transportation \(PBOT\)](#)
[Red Cross Cascades Region](#)

Scripted Posts

1. Before heading out for your morning commute, use TripCheck to get the latest updates on weather and road conditions. <http://www.tripcheck.com/Pages/RCmap.asp>
2. Do you have a plan if your power goes out? Take time to check your emergency kit before a storm hits and check the batteries in flashlights. If you don't already have a kit here's a list of recommended items: <http://www.ready.gov/kit>
3. Are you still in a storm warning? Get the latest weather updates from the NWS Oregon Facebook page. <http://www.facebook.com/US.NationalWeatherService.Portland.gov>
4. If your home was without power, your food may be at risk. Perishable foods can rapidly grow bacteria when kept at improper temperatures. Educate yourself on proper food storage and health risks of food after a winter storm. Use FoodSafety.gov food charts to help you decide what to keep and what to toss.
5. Before winter weather hits, winterize your vehicle. Keep your gas tank near full to help avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines. Restock your vehicle emergency kit with these: a shovel, salt/sand, ice scraper, blankets, water, extra clothing and flashlight. Keep them in your trunk just in case!
6. Space heaters cause one-third of home heating fires and are responsible for 4 out of 5 home heating fire deaths. Protect your family; if you're heating your home with a space heater this winter, take a few moments to review these safety tips from the U.S. Fire Administration: <http://go.usa.gov/crYcC>