

Preparing for Severe Winter Weather in Torrance County

By: Javier E. Sánchez, Torrance County Emergency Manager

With the cold, snowy weather we are experiencing this winter, it is important for Torrance County residents to adequately prepare for weather extremities such as the several storms that have recently dumped great amounts of snow upon the county and resulted in frigid temperatures. The purpose of this article is to inform county residents regarding methods for preparing for such weather. In any severe snow storm, the major issues homeowners must consider include (1) snow blockage to roadways and foot paths and (2) utilities outages/fuel shortages. In these situations, it is important that residents of especially rural and potentially inaccessible areas take measures to prepare for the worst in terms of enduring a period of time snow-blocked. The primary health and safety considerations for residents under such snow-packed conditions include (1) staying warm, (2) maintaining a healthy diet, and, (3) if you are a resident who must commute for either medical or employment reasons, maintaining a path of egress and ingress.

The most common and likely impediment caused by winter storms is snow blockage to both public and private roadways and foot paths. Snow blockage can prevent residents from exiting and entering their property, therefore, it is critical to prepare for such scenarios by either owning or obtaining the contracted services of a tractor blade or snow plow. It is important to note that the Torrance County Road Department is responsible for clearing county roads, but that private roads and driveways are off limits except in the event of a life-threatening emergency, whereby circumstances require emergency responders to have access to a residence and snow must be removed in order to get to the victim. Because county policy dictates that the use of county resources towards the improvement of personal property is unlawful, it is important for residents to take responsibility for private roads and driveways that the county cannot be held responsible for. Residents can accomplish this by either clearing private roadways and foot paths themselves or contracting the services of local tractor blade and snow plow owners. The following is a list of well-known local contractors whose services are available to the public for the purpose of snow removal:

Joe Barela (505) 384-2239 (Estancia)
David Crabb (505) 235-9421 (Durán)
Stanley Henson (505) 832-4403 (Moriarty)
Jamil Hindi (575) 799-4895 (Durán)
Johnny Luján (505) 705-5214 (Torreón)
Saúl Montes (505) 384-9424 (Estancia)
Randy Riley (505) 705-0508 (Mountainair)
Pablo Romero (505) 269-9723 (Manzano)
Steven Tórres (505) 705-5142 (La Ciénega)
Mathew Urban (505) 705-0578 (Tajique)

Utilities outages and fuel shortages also pose a problem for county residents during inclement weather. Preparing for a gas outage can be as simple as obtaining as many electrical heaters as needed to warm your residence. Electrical outages that can affect

gas-lit heating systems are more troublesome. Prolonged electrical outages often require a coordinated response from local authorities that depending on the scenario, can involve the relocation of residents to a shelter, therefore there is little residents can do except to have blankets on hand and await instructions from local authorities. Although it is uncommon for electrical and gas utilities to experience an outage simultaneously, it is important to prepare for these scenarios by having electric heaters and blankets on hand, as well as remaining vigilant for instructions from local authorities. Residents are encouraged to utilize wood-fueled heating systems as well as generators in order to be fully prepared for scenarios involving power outages. In the case of residences utilizing propane, fuel shortages are easily offset by proper planning in terms of filling tanks upon the approach of inclement weather or at least checking to make sure your tank is appropriately filled to match your needs. It is important to note that due to the high demand that occurs during these situations, at times this preparation must be made well beforehand in coordination with your fuel provider.

In a more general sense, preparing for winter weather can be framed around the more obvious ideas of stockpiling food and water, utilizing appropriate winter clothing and footwear, preparing your vehicle(s) in terms of fuel and maintenance, having tools such as shovels and tire chains readily available, prohibiting travel on icy roads, as well as preparing contingency plans for alternate places of stay in the case of residents requiring regular medical attention. These simple strategies are integral pieces of plans county residents should make for themselves in order to ensure their ability to cope with severe snow and play a responsible role in preparing for the frigid reality of winter weather in Torrance County.

If you have any questions regarding the contents of this article, please feel free to contact the Torrance County Office of Emergency Management at (505) 246-4748 or (505) 705-0836. Also, please remember that in the case of an emergency, call 911.