

## **Winter Storm Safety**

By Chris Grammes

Snow and ice storms are an inevitable part of the winter season. However, they can lead to downed power lines and outages. Remember the following tips to stay safe and warm should you find yourself in the dark after a severe winter event:

- Never touch a fallen power line, and assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. Call your electric co-op at (800) 442-865 or (231) 486-9200 to report it immediately. Avoid contact with overhead lines during cleanup and other activities.
- In the event of an outage, an alternate heating source—such as a fireplace, propane space heater, or wood stove—may be used. Extreme caution should be taken.
- Plan to stay in an area of the home where the alternate heat source is located.
- Fuel- and wood-burning heating sources should be vented. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions.
- Make sure carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors are working properly.
- Do not use a gas-powered oven for heating. A gas oven may go out or burn inefficiently, leading to carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Do not use a gas or charcoal grill inside the home. Do not use charcoal briquettes in the fireplace.

- If you use a portable generator to power a heating source, be sure the generator is located outside your house for proper ventilation. Do not use a generator in an attached garage. Follow manufacturer's directions for operating the generator.
- Take special care not to overload a generator. Use appropriately sized extension cords to carry the electric load. Make sure the cords have a grounded, three-pronged plug and are in good condition.
- Never run cords under rugs or carpets.
- Never connect generators to power lines. The reverse flow of electricity can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.

Ideally, your family will stay warm until the power comes back on. But keep an eye on family members for signs of hypothermia, which include shivering, drowsiness, and mental and physical slowness. The elderly and young children are particularly vulnerable to hypothermia. Call 911 immediately if you notice these symptoms. At least one telephone in the house that does not depend on electricity should be available in the case of a power outage.

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*Sources: Consumer Product Safety Commission; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Ag Safety Database)*

*Chris Grammes writes on safety issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.*