

Emergency Services Winter Weather Preparedness

It is again that time when extreme cold weather could potentially diminish Emergency Services Sector (ESS) response capabilities and threaten critical infrastructures, including emergency personnel. From an operational effectiveness perspective, extreme cold weather occurrences can be disruptive to the performance of duties and mission accomplishment. Freezing conditions make response operating conditions more hazardous and could adversely affect the available water supply. These consequences can potentially degrade an organization's critical infrastructures by endangering personnel, damaging equipment, and disrupting "response-ability." It is not too late to prepare personnel, apparatus, and equipment, and review cold-weather operating procedures.

The following cold weather preparedness information is taken from numerous sources in the ESS (law enforcement and fire):

- Establish procedures to assist fire and emergency operations by setting priorities for snow removal at stations, on primary response routes, and at essential areas such as hospitals, nursing homes, and other designated critical sites.
- Plan to work in concert with other emergency agencies to ensure that abandoned vehicles are removed, traffic is controlled during operations, and streets are closed for emergency responses.
- Stock sand or salt at station locations and carry smaller quantities on apparatus along with shovels.
- Use layers of warm clothing, and carry extra gloves and socks whenever operating outdoors. Ensure that the outer layer of clothing is waterproof and is reflective.
- Review rehabilitation procedures for cold weather and ensure that personnel can be monitored for hypothermia, hypoglycemia, and frostbite.
- Carry large amounts of cat litter or sand in each emergency vehicle.
- Carry a snow or flat shovel, lock de-icers, and extra window cleaning materials such as ice scrapers and window-washer fluid in each emergency vehicle.
- Ensure that winter tires with sufficient tread depth are on vehicles and check the availability and operating condition of tire traction devices.
- Inspect functionality of seatbelts and require their use.
- Encourage safe speeds and driving habits consistent with road conditions.

- Check antifreeze levels in vehicles, switch to cold-weather-appropriate blends of oil and fuel, and verify whether hydraulic systems need special cold weather fluids.
- Always keep your gas tank at least two-thirds full to prevent the vehicle's fuel line from freezing.
- Use engine block heaters for vehicles stored in unheated stations. Keep the water level above the level of the plates in batteries equipped with removable fill caps. Never attempt to jump start a frozen battery because it could explode. Instead, remove the battery from the vehicle, bring it into a warm room, and let it thaw before recharging.
- Consult pump operation and maintenance manual for specific recommendations regarding the storage and operation of pumps under very cold conditions.
- Carry extra hose and hydrant and water supply appliances on apparatus to increase operational options in case of delays by other apparatus.
- Test hydrants before use to ensure they are not frozen and drain and replace hose as soon as possible.
- Place water extinguishers inside apparatus to prevent freezing.
- Ensure that bunker boots and station boots are water repellent, provide traction, and are repaired or reconditioned, if necessary.
- Monitor the condition of breathing apparatus components for adverse effects from the cold.
- Review procedures for "dry pump" versus "wet pump" operations.

**For more information about Emergency Preparedness please contact the
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