

Media Release
9/30/04

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Winter Weather Awareness Week Highlights Safety on the Road

Summer has faded away, and autumn's brisk winds are beginning to have that chilly bite that makes heaters churn up and thick hooded sweatshirts appear. Winter is just around the corner, and with the season comes Montana's Winter Weather Awareness Week, October 4-8. As the temperature drops, many of us rush to and from our destinations, dashing through the doors and sprinting for our warm cars. Once inside, we feel safe from the bitter cold. But a vehicle can be a dangerous place in the winter.

On average, about 47 people die each year from winter related causes. Around 70 percent of these deaths occur in motor vehicles and nearly 25 percent are from exposure to snow and cold. The remaining 5 percent can be attributed to various events, including carbon monoxide poisoning (in stalled cars or running generators at home). Especially in Montana, and when traveling long distances, it is very important to practice winter safety and to know what to do if you encounter a problem while in your car. The following information includes tips on how to prepare your vehicle for the winter.

- 1. Fully winterize your vehicle before the season begins. This includes**
 - a. Checking your battery and fluids
 - b. Installing Snow Tires/ Chains
 - c. Carrying a winter storm survival kit in your vehicle. The kit should contain: a blanket or sleeping bag for each occupant; flashlight and extra batteries; first-aid kit, a knife; high calorie, nonperishable foods; extra dry clothing; large, empty can with plastic cover (a coffee can works well) with tissues and paper towels for sanitary purposes; smaller can with waterproof matches to melt snow for drinking water; sack of sand or cat litter; shovel; windshield scraper and brush; tool kit; tow rope; booster cables; bottled water; compass and road maps; highway flares; and if possible, a cell phone. Another couple other good things to have are gloves, hats, and several packages of chemical hand warmers.
- 2. Keep your gas tank at least half full to prevent your fuel tank and lines from freezing.**
- 3. Plan your travel and check the latest weather reports to avoid storms. Try not to travel alone and always let someone know your route and approximated arrival time. (Make sure to allow yourself extra time to reach your destination.)**
- 4. If you become stranded in your vehicle during winter weather conditions:**
 - a. Remain in your car. You will have shelter and will be easier to spot from the air.
 - b. Run the motor about 10 minutes each hour for heat.

- c. Open the window a little for fresh air and to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- d. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked.
- e. Turn on the dome light at night when running the engine.
- f. Tie a colored cloth, preferably red, to your antenna or door.
- g. When the snow stops falling, raise the hood to indicate you need help.
- h. Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers, and toes to keep your blood circulating and to keep warm.
- i. DO NOT EAT SNOW- this will lower your body temperature. If you need water melt it in the can till it is at room temperature and then drink the water.

5. If you must leave your car during a storm- use a life line or a rope.

It's also a good idea to know basic weather vocabulary, to understand what is going on in your area.

Winter storm watch:	A watch simply mean that the conditions are favorable for a storm to occur.
Winter storm warning:	Severe winter weather conditions are imminent
Blizzards:	Winds of 35 mph or more with snow and blowing snow reducing visibility to less than ¼ mile for at least 3 hours

For more information on weather awareness, or to request a copy of “Montana’s Take-Along Winter Survival Handbook,” produced by the State of Montana Disaster and Emergency Services contact Tanja Fransen, warning coordination meteorologist, National Weather Service Glasgow at 406-228-2850, or your county disaster and emergency services coordinator. The NWS web site also has winter weather information. You can access this site at: www.weather.gov.