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OFFICIALS OFFER SNOWSTORM/ICE STORM HEALTH/SAFETY ADVICE

New York State Department of Health officials remind residents that cleaning up from a snowstorm is hard work. They offer these safety tips: before you pick up a snow shovel, consider your physical condition. If you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember to dress appropriately and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.

Health officials noted that the storm's aftermath presents numerous additional health and safety concerns, and cautioned that frail or elderly individuals are at increased risk. Older individuals are particularly vulnerable to cold temperatures, and may not be able to stay in their homes during a long power outage. Even if they still have electricity, they may need help digging out.

Check on your family or neighbors and find out how they're doing. Make sure they know what to do—and what *not* to do—to protect their health. If you are under a physician's care, be sure to call your healthcare provider as soon as possible, in the event of a snowstorm, for guidance about what you should do regarding pending medical appointments.

Generator safety

Never run a generator inside your home, basement or attached garage. Generators should only be operated outside, away from open windows. Carbon monoxide in the generator's fumes can build up and cause carbon monoxide poisoning, which can lead to death. Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading your generator can damage it and any appliances connected to it. Fire may result. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Fuel spilled on a hot generator can cause an explosion. If your generator has a detachable fuel tank, remove it before refilling. If this is not possible, shut off the generator and let it cool before refilling.

Alternate Heating Sources

If you use a fireplace, wood stove, or portable kerosene heater to stay warm, be sure there is adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough fresh air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up in your home. Never use a natural gas or propane stove/oven to heat your home. If you are using a kerosene heater, use 1-K grade kerosene only. Never substitute with fuel oil, diesel, gasoline or yellow (regular) kerosene.

Open a window to provide ventilation when a portable kerosene heater is in use to reduce carbon monoxide fumes inside the home. If you plan to cook on a barbeque grill or camp stove, remember these also produce carbon monoxide and are for outdoor use only.

Fire safety

When adding fuel to a space heater, or wood to a wood stove or fireplace, wear non-flammable gloves and clothing.

Never add fuel to a space heater when it is hot. The fuel can ignite, burning you and your home. Keep the heater away from objects that can burn, such as furniture, rugs or curtains. If you have a fire extinguisher, keep it nearby. Be careful with candles—never leave them burning if you leave the room. Keep children away from space heaters, fireplaces and wood stoves to avoid accidental burns.

Chain saw safety

If heavy snow or ice has downed tree limbs, you may need to use a chain saw to clean up debris. Be especially careful around chain saws. Before using a chain saw to clear downed tree limbs, know how to safeguard against injury. Always operate, adjust, and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions provided in the manual accompanying the chain saw.

- Properly sharpen chain saw blades and properly lubricate the blade with bar and chain oil. Additionally, the operator should periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade to ensure good cutting action.
- Choose the proper size of chain saw to match the job, and include safety features such as a chain brake, front and rear hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester.
- Wear the appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg-wear (chain saw chaps) that extend from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until the lines are verified as being de-energized.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure that you maintain secure control over the chain saw.

Bystanders or co-workers should remain at least 2 tree lengths (at least 150 feet) away from anyone felling a tree and at least 30 feet from anyone operating a chain saw to remove limbs or cut a fallen tree.

Food safety

During a power outage, open your refrigerator and freezer as little as possible. Eat the most perishable items first, such as leftovers, meat, poultry and food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.

Despite your best efforts, the food in your freezer may partially or completely thaw before power is restored. Foods that have completely thawed, but are still cold and have been kept cold for no longer than one or two days after thawing, may be eaten or refrozen under certain conditions:

- Fruits may be eaten or refrozen if they still taste and smell good.
- Do not eat or refreeze vegetables that have thawed completely since bacteria multiply rapidly in them.
- Meat and poultry should be thrown away if their color or odor is poor or questionable, or if they have been held at a temperature warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours.
- Fish and shellfish should not be eaten or refrozen once they have thawed.

Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out!

More information is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.semo.state.ny.us or by calling Greene County Public Health Nursing Service at 518-719-3600.

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