

Managing Winter Risks

With winter in full swing, weather during this time of year can turn paths, stairs, and campus roadways into skating rinks; wear down vehicles and equipment; and create fire hazards. Thorough planning for these seasonal risks can make them manageable. Anything less may result in serious accidents on campus.

Walking Safety

The risk of accidents, and the often-serious injuries that result, only increase in icy and snowy conditions.

- Take special care while walking in wet weather and at night and when walking across lawns, parking lots, and walkways. Whenever possible, keep off the grass because, when frozen, it does not provide enough traction to prevent a slip.
- Walk on level surfaces whenever possible.
- Wear shoes and boots that provide some traction, such as flat shoes with slip resistant soles, or rain or snow boots.
- On slippery surfaces, or those you're unsure of, walk slowly, and brace yourself by pointing your feet outward.
- Take short, flat steps, keeping the heels and soles of your shoes in contact with the ground as long as possible.
- Taking short cuts across snow piles is dangerous and must be avoided. They are slippery and unstable.
- Use handrails when available.
- Avoid causing indoor slipping hazards by shaking your umbrella outdoors before you come in and removing your shoes at the doorway.

Vehicle Safety

Winter puts added strain on vehicles and equipment, and the people who use them.

Snow, ice, wind, and cold temperatures can create dangerous roads, cause blinding driving conditions, and put significant demands on your car and the driver. Whatever other preparations you take, there is no better substitute for safety than defensive driving.

- Remove all ice and snow from your vehicle before driving.
- Check for ice and snow on the front, back, and side windows; the mirrors; the headlights and tail lights; and the license plates.
- Inspect your windshield wipers to ensure they move freely and make full contact with the windshield, and make sure the windshield washer antifreeze reservoir is full.

Car batteries are another concern because in colder temperatures a weak battery may not be able to start a cold engine. It is important to

- Check the strength of car batteries as part of the vehicle maintenance program, especially in the winter.
- Keep at least a half tank of fuel in your car. When temperatures drop, any water in your fuel and fuel line has the potential to freeze; with less fuel and more water, the chance of this occurring is greater.
- Be prepared to dig out of trouble by keeping a shovel in your vehicle as well as a container of sand or cat litter and a large can of salt.

Fire Safety

The risk of indoor fires increases during the winter when people spend more time inside. Approximately 1,380 fires occurred in school, college, and university dormitories and fraternity and sorority housing in 1998, the most recent year for statistics, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Cooking was second only to arson as the leading cause of these fires. During winter holidays, decorations and candles present additional fire hazards. Proactive steps can help reduce these fire risks.

Cooking

Encourage people to follow these safe-cooking tips:

- Cook only where permitted.
- Keep the cooking area clean and uncluttered.
- Unplug electric appliances when not in use.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Do not wear loose sleeves when cooking, and keep long hair pulled back.
- If a fire breaks out in a microwave oven, keep the door closed and unplug the unit. Don't try to remove burning containers from a microwave.

The steps you take now to manage the risks ahead can help to keep your campus community safe throughout the long, cold winter days.