

Winter Travel Tips –Are You Prepared?

Have you been prepared for the ice/snow that's made recent winter travel treacherous?

Here are some tips to ease your stress AND improve your family's safety. *Know Weather Terms and Prepare for Emergencies* – from Kansas State University climatologist Mary Knapp:

- **Winter weather watch vs. winter weather warning --**

If a winter weather watch is announced, travelers should be aware that conditions *are likely to become unfavorable*. Get prepared! A winter weather warning means *adverse conditions have arrived*, and the challenges those conditions bring are occurring. Be prepared now!

Warnings are issued for winter storms, ice storms, heavy snow, blizzards and heavy sleet.

- **Winter storms vs. Blizzards**

A *winter storm generally means cold temperatures and snowfall*, with snow accumulation more than three inches, Knapp said. When warnings are announced, an indication of expected snowfall is given. *Blizzards are more about wind and visibility*. Blizzard conditions involve winds of more than 30 miles per hour and visibility less than a quarter of a mile for at least three hours. Driving can be extremely hazardous.

- **Winter weather advisories, however, are not expected to be dangerous.**

The greatest challenge that can arise with a winter storm advisory is the transition rate from rain to snow, said Knapp. However, travel could be impacted

- **Hazardous road conditions**

As falling temperatures arrive, roadways begin freezing over. Changing road conditions can be hazardous to motorists as temperatures fall, and rain turns to ice. Knapp said travelers should be aware of "black ice," a condition where road surfaces appear wet but are a frozen sheet of ice.

- **Prepare for emergencies**

When you're on the road during the winter months, it's important to be prepared with a set of emergency items for your travels, Knapp said. Items to include in a winter travel kit are jumper cables, a flashlight with an extra set of batteries, gloves, a hat, blankets, a source of water and extra food, a shovel, salt or sand, and a towrope. Most of the kit can be left in your vehicle, she said, but be sure to bring fresh water for each trip to avoid frozen water.

"Another thing to keep in mind is quite often we don't carry the outdoor gear that we might normally, because we're in the car where it's warm and comfortable," Knapp said. "You want to have, at least in the trunk, an extra layer. Include boots or shoes that are more substantial than what you're wearing for the drive. If you get stranded, you've got that extra layer of protection."

"If you're stranded, stay in your vehicle," she said. "Try to get the vehicle off the roadway if you can, even off the shoulder where you're out of the traffic lane. It will increase your safety."

Knapp said to travel during daylight hours for greater visibility, if possible.

These tips are offered by Mary Knapp, K-State climatologist, 2014. More information on winter weather safety is available through the K-State Research and Extension Weather Data Library. Detailed information on road conditions can be found at the Kansas Department of Transportation website --

www.511.ksdot.org or call 511.