HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

Safety Tips for Extended Power Outages

Extreme weather can affect anyone, particularly when there are strong winds. However, the following groups or individuals are at the greatest risk, *especially those living alone*:

- Seniors
- Children
- Babies sleeping in cold bedrooms
- The disabled
- The homeless
- People taking certain prescription medications
- People with circulatory problems
- Those who are under the influence of alcohol
- Outdoor workers

Strategies during power outages and other severe weather situations:

- If you have friends, neighbours or relatives who live alone or have difficulty with mobility, check on them regularly during times of severe weather or power outages.
- For those who are dependent on oxygen, ensure tanks have at least *two days* of a backup supply of oxygen in the event of a power outage or the potential for road closures.
- Older adults make less body heat due to slower metabolisms and less physical activity, while infants make less body heat than adults and can't regulate their body heat by shivering. Take the time to ensure inside temperatures are adequate and that seniors and babies are well dressed and have access to warm, nutritious food.
- Also check to see that water pipes haven't frozen and walkways are cleared of ice and snow.
- Exposure to extreme or extended cold can result in injuries such as frostnip, frostbite, or hypothermia. ***Frostnip*** is a relatively minor reaction to cold. ***Frostbite*** is more serious, with freezing of tissues. Check children's faces and extremities (fingers, toes, ears and noses) for signs numbness or pale skin. ***Hypothermia*** is a life-threatening condition where the body temperature falls to below 35 C. In adults, watch for confusion, slurred speech, shivering, and clumsiness. In infants, hypothermia may result in bright red skin and very low energy.
- Be aware that tobacco, alcohol and certain medications increase susceptibility to the cold.
- Provide non-alcoholic beverages such as lukewarm water, soup or tea.

First Aid for Electrical Shock

If you believe someone has been electrocuted take the following steps:

- Look first. Don't touch. The person may still be in contact with the electrical source. Touching the person may pass the current through you.
- Call or have someone else call 911 or emergency medical help.
- Turn off the source of electricity if possible. If not, move the source away from you and the affected person using a nonconducting object made of cardboard, plastic or wood.

- Once the person is free of the source of electricity, check the person's breathing and pulse. If either has stopped or seems dangerously slow or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately.
- If the person is faint or pale or shows other signs of shock, lay the person down with the head slightly lower than the trunk of his or her body and the legs elevated.
- Don't touch burns, break blisters, or remove burned clothing. Electrical shock may cause burns inside the body, so be sure the person is taken to a doctor.

Power Line Hazards and Cars

- If a power line falls on a car, stay inside the vehicle. This is the safest place to stay. Warn people not to touch the car or the line. Call or ask someone to call the local utility company and emergency services.
- The only time you should consider leaving a car that is in contact with a downed power line is if the vehicle catches on fire. Open the door. Do not step out of the car. You may receive a shock. Instead, jump free of the car so that your body clears the vehicle before touching the ground. Once you clear the car, shuffle at least 50 feet away, with both feet on the ground.
- As in all power line related emergencies, call for help immediately by dialing 911 or call your electric utility company's Service Center/Dispatch Office.
- Do not try to help someone else from the car while you are standing on the ground.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning

- Ensure those who live alone are not using gas stoves or oven, for heating. Using a gas range or oven for heating can cause a build up of CO inside the home, cabin, or camper.
- Make sure charcoal or barbecue grills are not being used indoors. Using a grill indoors, or burning charcoal of any kind, will also cause a build up of CO.
- As well, check to see that portable gas camp stoves are not being used indoors. Using a gas camp stove indoors can cause deadly CO to build up.
- Finally, make sure that a generator has not been brought inside the person's home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent. Running a generator indoors is similar to starting a car indoors and CO poisoning may result.

Be Prepared for an Emergency

Provincial emergency personnel recommend people make an emergency plan that includes a disaster supply kit. This kit should include enough water, dried and canned food, and emergency supplies (flashlights, batteries, first-aid supplies, prescription medicines, and a digital thermometer) to last at least 3 days. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches (to minimize the risk of fire). You can find more information on emergency plans and supply kits at www.pep.bc.ca.

How to Protect Your Food

VIHA offers a Health and Safety Tip Sheet to help protect your food from spoiling during extended power outages. Go to: Food Safety Tips for Power Failures