

Get ready for winter!

Is your organisation ready for winter?

This year everyone across Scotland is being encouraged to get ready for winter.

Getting ready for winter is something we all need to do – it takes only a few simple steps.

It's time to start thinking about how you could be affected by severe weather, and what you need to do now to be better prepared.

Whether it's at home, in



your community and neighbourhood, or behind the wheel, we all need to consider how we can get ready for winter.

By thinking about how we can all get ready for winter, we can help Scotland be better prepared.

The year before last's severe weather caught many people out. How prepared are you should

it happen again this winter?

From a voluntary sector perspective this is a good time to think about your responsibilities as an employer, your personal safety, and your duties to vulnerable clients.

If you would like a copy of our Business Continuity Template please contact Lesley at lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk

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KEEP THIS NEWSLETTER SOMEWHERE SAFE FOR REFERENCE... WHY DON'T YOU EMAIL IT TO YOUR HOME ADDRESS IN CASE YOU DON'T MAKE IT INTO THE OFFICE?

Be prepared for gales

Very strong winds have the potential to bring down trees, power lines and signs, and can turn unsecured objects into dangerous projectiles. Prior to

anticipated storms, secure loose objects such as garden furniture. Securely fasten all windows and doors. Park vehicles in a garage if



possible or park clear of trees and buildings. Make sure that chimneys, satellite dishes and tv aerials are structurally sound.

If you are caught outside during high winds, take cover next to a building or under a secure shelter. Stand clear of roadways or train tracks, as a gust may blow you into the path of an oncoming vehicle. Use handrails where available, and avoid elevated areas such as roofs.

Watch for flying debris. Tree limbs may break and street signs may come loose during strong winds.

In the event of a downed power line:

- Report downed lines to the electricity company

and the police

- Avoid anything that may be touching downed lines, including vehicles or tree branches
- If a line falls on your car, stay inside the vehicle. Take care not to touch any part of the metal frame of your vehicle. Honk your horn, roll down the window and warn anyone who may approach of the danger. Ask someone to call the police. Do not exit the car until help arrives, unless it catches fire. To exit, open the door, but do not step out. Jump, without touching any of the metal portions of the car's exterior, to safe ground and get quickly away.

Drive safely this winter

Lots of voluntary sector staff in Midlothian commute to work, or have to drive as part of their job. There are lots of simple things we can all do to make journeys safer and less stressful during really bad weather. Taking a bit of time to think now and plan ahead for the weather could make life much easier. **Ready Scotland** give the following advice about travelling...



Before your journey

It can really help to plan your journey in bad weather. Before travelling you should:

- check the weather forecast and road conditions
- think if you really need to travel right now. Could you wait until the weather improves?
- think about alternative routes and other modes of transport
- allow extra time for your journey
- make sure your vehicle's ready for a journey in poor weather
- consider fitting winter tyres or snow socks to your vehicle
- carry an emergency kit
- consider whether you need to change your driving style to suit the conditions
- tell someone at your destination what time you expect to arrive
- visit the Traffic Scotland website to identify any problems on trunk roads www.trafficscotland.org or call the Traffic Customer Care Line on 0800 028 1414

Some essentials for your car

Here are some simple things you should keep in your car, in case the weather turns nasty:

- a blanket
- warm winter clothing (including boots)
- ice scraper and de-icer
- battery jump leads
- map for any unplanned diversions
- a first-aid kit
- a torch and spare batteries
- a mobile phone and charger
- a shovel for snow
- food and drink that will last (and a warm drink in a flask before each journey)



Before you drive

It is important to check that your vehicle is well maintained and serviced. You should:

- make sure the battery's reliable (and replace if it's not)
- check your tyres have plenty of tread depth and are at the correct pressure
- keep your lights clean and check the bulbs
- keep your windscreen clean (dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see in low winter sun).
- replace worn wiper blades
- add anti-freeze to the radiator and winter additive to the windscreen washer bottles
- before driving off, make sure your windows, lights and mirrors are clear of mist, ice and snow (inside and out)

During your journey

Be aware of changing road and weather conditions, even if it's a road you use regularly. When the weather's really bad, you may need to change the way you drive. You should:

- reduce speed in bad weather
- increase stopping distances
- avoid sudden acceleration and braking
- use dipped headlights in poor conditions
- take breaks every two or three hours
- do not pass closed snow gates
- listen to radio travel bulletins
- check the information on roadside message boards

Driving through ice and snow

- your stopping distance increases ten times when driving in snow and ice
- select second gear when pulling away, easing your foot off the clutch gently to avoid wheel-spin
- it's not always obvious that the road's icy – look for clues like ice on the pavement or on your windscreen
- don't brake too hard – it'll just lock up your wheels and make you skid further
- clear any snow on the roof of the vehicle before you drive off, as it can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view
- look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs

MVA also produce a Transport e-briefing which can be requested from margaret.nisbet@mvacvs.org.uk or downloaded from our website <http://www.mvacvs.org.uk/publications/mva/index.html>. This contains more information that might be of use for preparation for severe weather, as well as more general driving and other transport information.

Midlothian Roads

Midlothian Council, as part of its Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan has agreed the following Policy Service Standards:

1. Keep agreed priority route and main Bus routes free from snow and ice as far as reasonably practicable as a priority.
2. Clear agreed road and footway 'Access Routes' to all schools and education establishments within Midlothian during periods of snow.
3. Support facilities management staff within school grounds during periods of prolonged snow conditions, as required and as resources are available.
4. Support social / care centres in clearing pedestrian access routes in and around facilities.
5. Maintain waste collection services as far as possible, set up local collection points when and if conditions allow.
6. Support NHS facilities with hand crews to clear footways and pedestrian access areas.
7. Support local community groups by providing bulk bags of salt / grit at pre agreed locations during periods of prolonged snow conditions.



The Council also publishes some useful documents including:

- Midlothian Priority Gritting Routes
- Winter parking restrictions

All these documents are available at:

http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/downloads/1291/gritting_and_snow_clearance

**IMPORTANT COUNCIL
PHONE NUMBERS**

Check the council's
website
www.midlothian.gov.uk or
call their contact centre on
0131 663 7211.

In a social work
emergency you can call
0800 731 6969 (out of
normal office hours).

Winter Information and Safety Tips



- * In bad weather, Midlothian Council clears priority routes first. Details of these can be found on our website at www.midlothian.gov.uk/gritting.
- * If possible, clear snow from paths and pavements outside your home and those of elderly and vulnerable neighbours.
- * Always wear suitable clothing and footwear outdoors.
- * If you must abandon your car, try to leave it where it will not hinder Council staff from removing snow.
- * Heed police warnings not to travel. Always carry an emergency kit in your car when driving.
- * Please check up on anyone who might be at risk in severe weather. During the festive period when offices are closed, the emergency social work service can be contacted on 0800 731 6969.

NB: Check the Midlothian Council website for up-to-date information on www.midlothian.gov.uk. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter. For general winter service enquiries call us on 0131 270 5730.

Winter-proof your office

Some things you might want to think about, particularly if your office is closing over the winter break...

- Follow Scottish Water's advice on [protecting your pipes](#).
- Know where your stop valve is and how to turn off your water.
- If cold weather is forecast, and during a cold snap, keep your heating on at a low temperature to help prevent pipes from freezing.
- Know how to turn off your electricity supply at the mains.
- Making your premises energy-efficient will make it cheaper and quicker to heat during cold weather.
- Check the terms of your insurance policies, and find out what cover you have for risks such as flood or storm damage, or for the costs of temporary accommodation if your premises are not habitable.
- Make sure you will be able to [clear your paths and driveway](#) if severe weather strikes. It's a good idea to keep a shovel (specially designed snow shovels are particularly good), and some salt or grit at your premises, and find out where your nearest local

authority public grit bin is.

- A non-mains powered landline telephone will help you stay in touch during any disruptions to your power supply.

Dealing with common winter damage to your office

- If your pipes freeze, turn off the stop valve immediately, open all cold taps to drain the system, but don't turn on hot taps - your hot water cylinder may collapse if the pipes leading to it are frozen. Call a licensed plumber if you are in any doubt about what to do. More [advice on burst and frozen pipes](#) is available from the Scottish Water website.
- Never attempt to thaw out frozen pipes by switching on your immersion heater or central heating boiler. Instead, check for leaking joints or bursts in the pipes. Then gently heat any frozen sections with a hairdryer or a heated cloth wrapped around the pipe. Never apply a direct flame.
- Be aware that snow and ice could fall from roofs suddenly. Be prepared and predict where it might fall and don't park your car, bikes or garden furniture in its path. Contact your insurer if snow or ice has caused damage to the fabric of your property.

Protect your pipes
Be prepared this winter
heat, insulate and protect your home

www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter
 Customer Helpline: 0845 601 8855
www.facebook.com/scottishwater
twitter.com/scottishwaterpr

Download a QR reader to scan the code on your smart phone for more information.

Scottish Water
Always saving Scotland

- If you need to evacuate (and if it's safe and time permits) turn off the water and electricity, grab your [emergency kit](#), and secure your premises.

More information from Ready Scotland or

www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter
 Customer Helpline: **0845 601 8855**
www.facebook.com/scottishwater
twitter.com/scottishwaterpr

Loss of utilities



Power cuts and loss of other utilities including gas, water and telephones can happen during the winter, just when we need these services the most.

While utility companies in Scotland have

well-tested plans in place to deal with all kinds of events, there are steps you can take now that will help you cope with any [loss of utilities](#) in future.

Keep mobile phones and lap top computers fully charged, so you will have use of battery power for a short time at least if there is a power cut. Certain types of mobile phone allow you to access the internet and other services, which will help you to stay informed.

Make a list of all the telephone numbers you might need, and keep them handy.

Here are a few to get you started:

National Gas Emergency Service (if you smell gas) 0800 111 999

Scottish Gas 0800 048 0202

Scottish Power 0845 272 7999

Scottish Hydro Electric 0800 300 999

Scottish Water 0845 601 8855



What do employers need to 'snow' about bad weather?

Last year Law at Work provided this very useful article about employers' rights and responsibilities....

In recent years arctic conditions have caused many travel and broken down boiler related nightmares, but for employers and HR staff the snow and ice also bring additional problems when deciding how to cope if the majority of their workforce cannot make it into work or if they are forced to close the workplace.

Employers should be aware that they are under no obligation to pay employees in a situation where they are unable to get into work due to the snow, unless the employee's contract specifically provides for payment in such circumstances. It is important that employers should consider any means that they can to accommodate such employees, for example by letting them work from home, providing alternative means of transport or allowing them to work on different days.

If there are no such options available the employer should notify employees as soon as possible that they will not receive pay, will receive pay, or if they will

be paid on a discretionary basis. They may want to inform the employee that they can take annual leave if they wish but the employer cannot insist on the employee doing this.

There will be some situations where an employer is forced to close their business. Again, some employees may be able to work from home, in which case the employer will be eligible to pay them. If employees are unable to work when the employer closes the business, then the employer should pay them for this period unless the employee's contract provides for



a period of unpaid lay off or the employees have agreed that there will be a period of unpaid lay off. In a situation where there is a contractual clause allowing for unpaid lay off, the employee may still be entitled to a guarantee payment, which has a maximum level of £23.50 per day.

A key consideration for employers in these

circumstances is communication.

Employees and staff should be updated as to whether they will receive pay or whether the workplace is to be closed. The last thing an employer wants is for a member of staff to travel all the way to work to find out that the business has been closed for the day. Employers should also ensure that the business premises are salted and cleared of snow.

The TUC have stated that the "best practice is simply to pay as normal those staff who cannot make it in." However, this is not necessarily a realistic approach for two reasons: firstly, employers will be unable to run their business and make a profit without their staff and, secondly, it is extremely unfair for those members of staff who make an effort to endure the extreme weather and make their way to work, to find that those who do not are paid anyway.

So communicate, decide early and don't feel that you have to act like Santa Claus!

Law At Work is a support organisation, specialising in helping clients identify, manage, reduce, and eliminate risk to their businesses in employment law, human resources, and health & safety.

www.lawatwork.co.uk

How cold is too cold?

What is the minimum/maximum temperature in the workplace?

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 lay down particular requirements for most aspects of the working environment. Regulation 7 deals specifically with the temperature in indoor workplaces and states that: 'During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.' However, the application of the regulation depends on the nature of the workplace, such as a bakery, a cold store, an office, a warehouse.

The associated ACOP ([Workplace health, safety and welfare. Workplace \(Health, Safety and Welfare\) Regulations 1992. Approved Code of Practice](#)) goes on to explain:

The temperature in workrooms should provide reasonable comfort without the need for special clothing. Where such a temperature is impractical because of hot or cold processes, all reasonable steps should be taken to achieve a temperature which is as close as possible to comfortable. 'Workroom' means a room where people normally work for more than short periods.

The temperature in workrooms should

normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius unless much of the work involves severe physical effort in which case the temperature

should be at least 13 degrees Celsius. These temperatures may not, however, ensure reasonable comfort, depending on other factors such as air movement and relative humidity.

This text was supplied by the National Health & Safety Company

www.nationalhealthandsafetycompany.com



Supporting vulnerable clients

The MET office notes that severe cold weather can be dangerous for vulnerable groups such as older people and those with serious illnesses. It's important for people to look after their health as the winter months can mean:

- an increase in heart attacks and stroke - accounting for 40 per cent of excess winter deaths;
- pressure on GPs - GP visits for respiratory illnesses increase by up to 19 per cent for every 1 °C drop below 5 °C of the mean temperature;
- more pressure on the NHS - in 2009/10, the cost of emergency admissions due to falls on snow and ice was estimated at £42million; and
- it is estimated that over £850 million is spent by the NHS each year as a result of the impact of cold housing on people's health.

Understanding the effects of cold weather

Cold, especially extreme cold, can be dangerous for everyone. Even in a normal winter, there are tens of thousands of deaths caused by the cold.

The NHS provide the following guidelines to their employees about supporting vulnerable clients, many of which are useful for voluntary sector staff.

Extremely cold weather can cause mild hypothermia, which increases the risks of some illnesses – including heart attacks, strokes and respiratory disease – and the likelihood of falls.

Who is at risk?

Some people are more at risk of becoming ill during cold weather. A number of factors can determine who is more vulnerable during winter:

- Older age – especially people who are over 75 years old.
- Young age – particularly children with respiratory problems, such as asthma.
- Chronic and severe illness – including heart conditions, respiratory insufficiency, asthma and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- Fuel poverty – over 75% of those who cannot afford to adequately heat their homes are single adult households.
- Inability to adapt behaviour to keep warm – this affects people with disabilities, babies and the very young.
- Environment and overexposure – such as homelessness, or living in a cold, damp home with poor or inadequate heating and insulation.

Planning ahead

By planning ahead, health and social care providers can offer care and support for people at risk in the event of a cold snap. All high-risk individuals who live alone are likely to need daily contact with care workers, volunteers or informal carers. Older people, especially older women, people with chronic or serious illness or mobility problems, or those living in hard-to-heat accommodation, may need extra care and support.

Cold snaps can take place with little warning, with illness and death occurring within the first couple of days. In fact, it is possible to predict when excess deaths occur after a cold snap: deaths caused by heart attack happen two days later; deaths caused by stroke happen five days later; and deaths caused by respiratory disease happen 12 days later. So it is best to be prepared before cold temperatures are forecast – ideally by the beginning of November. Use care plans to help you to assess which individuals are at risk, and identify what extra help they might need.

Before a cold snap...

If you are treating, visiting, supporting or caring for someone in their own home, take these steps before the weather turns cold. Where possible, involve their family and any informal carers.

Top tips – heating in the home

Poor heating is a key factor in many excess winter deaths. People living in cold homes are at 20% greater risk of excess winter death than those living in warm homes.

Ask whether the home is properly insulated: lofts should have at least 10 inches of insulation, and wall cavities should be insulated too. There are grants available to help make homes more energy efficient – see **Changeworks** article opposite.

Make sure the thermostat is set so that the main rooms are at 21°C during the day and bedrooms are at 18°C at night. See whether they have fitted draught-proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors.

Top tips – health and benefits

- Check whether the person needs a benefit entitlement check. If they are eligible for additional benefits and credits, they could see an increase in their annual income of over £1,400.
- Make sure they have had a seasonal flu jab.
- Advise giving up smoking – this would improve circulation and reduce the chance of a heart attack.

During a cold snap...

There are a number of actions that people can take to keep themselves warm during winter.

Top tips – keeping warm

- Advise them to close curtains and shut doors to keep heat in the rooms used the most.
- Recommend using hot water bottles or electric blankets (but never both together) if the bedroom is cold at night.
- Encourage them to eat well – food is a vital source of warmth, so they should eat regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day.
- Encourage them to keep moving if possible – it is good for health and improves circulation.

Top tips – for health and social care providers

- Stay in regular contact throughout the cold snap.
- Try to arrange for someone to visit at least once a day.

Midlothian Council Support for Vulnerable Individuals

The Council's social work team will run an emergency helpline which is activated and publicised if severe weather arrives. This is for elderly and vulnerable people without other means of support, for example where carers or family members are unavailable.

The helpline can assist if they are running out of their prescription medication and/or need basic groceries like bread and milk. The council works in partnership with the British Red Cross so if you phone, they can arrange for a volunteer to pick up and deliver an emergency prescription and supplies to your home.

It's important that everyone keeps in contact with any friends and neighbours who might require assistance during periods of severe weather. Older people particularly value the information support they receive from neighbours during these times. Someone they know popping round can help to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

If you would like to help any elderly or vulnerable people in your area you could contact your local community council.

If the weather is bad you or someone you know might be concerned about transport or whether a council facility has had to close. For up to date information during severe weather visit the council's website www.midlothian.gov.uk or call our contact centre on 0131 663 7211.



In a social work emergency you can call 0800 731 6969 (out of normal office hours).



Energy prices keep rising and many people will struggle this winter living in a cold home or will get into fuel debt.

There is help out there to support people who are struggling to keep their home warm: to identify if someone needs help **ask these four key questions:**

- Is your home cold?
- Is your home damp?
- Is your home draughty?
- Are you concerned about affording energy in your home?

If the answer is 'yes' to any of these, what next? Support is available through:

1) the **Scottish Government's Energy Assistance Package**. Just ring the Energy Saving Scotland advice

Keeping affordably warm this winter

centre on **0800 512 012** for more information.

2) **Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Team** provide outreach support to people who struggle with heating costs, gas or electricity debt, or with staying warm, dry and comfortable in their home. We can help people get the most out of their heating and hot water system, resolve fuel billing problems, help negotiate with suppliers, access energy efficiency grants and give advice on choosing a suitable gas/electricity tariff. We can support people living in Midlothian, Edinburgh and East Lothian, and can visit people at home. If you would like to contact one of our advisors: email warmth@changeworks.org.uk fill in our online referral form on our website: www.changeworks.org.uk.householders/free-energy-advice-referral-form/569/ or call 0800 512 012 and ask for the Affordable Warmth Outreach Team.

COMMUNICATION

How will we communicate if it snows?

If there is another episode of severe weather the Council will set up daily Emergency Planning meetings to coordinate the Midlothian response. MVA will attend these meetings on behalf of the voluntary sector, and feed key information out to the sector through our e-mail distribution list. We can also raise issues of concern to the voluntary sector at the meeting. In addition to e-mails we will keep our Facebook site updated. Please contact us if you think we may not have an up-to-date e-mail address for your key staff member(s).



Social Media

Midlothian Council:

Website: <http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/midgov>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MidlothianCouncil>

Midlothian Voluntary Action

Website: <http://www.mvacvs.org.uk/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/MVACommunity>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MidlothianVoluntaryAction>

Lothian Region Transport

Website: <http://lothianbuses.com/>

Twitter: http://twitter.com/#!/ON_LOTHIANBUSES

(a good site to check if you have a Smartphone and want to know if the bus you are waiting on has got stuck in snow!)

First Bus

Website: <http://www.firstbus.co.uk/>

Other Essential Contacts

For all other essential contact details see the Ready Scotland website:

<http://www.readyscotland.org/are-you-ready/winter-weather/essential-contacts/>

Remember: Protect Your Data!

If you have staff working from home using personal computers or laptops during severe weather you must still comply with your data protection responsibilities. **DO NOT HOLD PERSONAL DATA ABOUT STAFF OR CLIENTS ON UNENCRYPTED LAPTOPS OR COMPUTERS.** If you need more information about keeping electronic data secure contact Lesley at lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk

READY SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government's 'Ready Scotland' website provides a wide range of information on emergencies and how to prepare for them. The site is available at: <http://www.readyscotland.org>

