

VILLAGE OEM OFFERS WINTER STORM GUIDANCE

With significant snowfalls and winter weather several safety points should be considered to ensure the safety of you, your family, and your home.

Carbon Monoxide

The Lancaster Fire Department has seen an increase in the number of carbon monoxide incidents and detector activations due to snow accumulation and build-up .

A common problem is high snow drifts that block furnace vents and air intakes in some homes, predominantly those that have newer high-efficiency furnaces. New, high efficiency furnaces vent out the side of a home rather than up through the roof. These vents and air intakes must be kept clear of snow. If they are blocked, the carbon monoxide will go back into the home. Some newer high efficiency furnaces have automatic shut-off's that shutdown the furnace when the vents are blocked, but not all of them. As a general rule you should keep a three-foot area clear around the vent and intake tubes.

After any snowfall it is important to inspect the area around the furnace and hot water heater vents to ensure that snow and ice are not blocking the safe operation of these fuel burning devices. Homeowners should keep a three- foot area around the vents clear of snow, shrubs, or other potential obstructions.

Heating and dryer vents should also be cleared of snow to prevent possible carbon monoxide poisoning. Do not run generators in the home, garage, or other enclosed spaces as carbon monoxide can rise to dangerous, if not fatal levels.

If your CO alarm sounds, immediately evacuate to a safe location and call 9.1.1.

Fire Hydrants

With heavy snowfall it is important to shovel out fire hydrants on or near your property. In the event of a fire the Fire Department will lose valuable time attempting to locate and dig out a buried fire hydrant. Help us help you!

Weight of Snow of Rooftops

Another area of concern is the weight of snow on roofs. Building codes address the amount of snow a roof should be designed to handle, depending on snow fall averages. Most newer homes are built to these codes, but older homes may have been built under different codes and therefore present a greater risk of roof collapse.

Roofs can fail for several reasons that can include:

- Older structures may not be designed to the current standards.
- Roof drains and/or downspouts become blocked or frozen preventing proper roof draining.
- Imbalance of snow load on roof from drifting

Some warning signs associated with a potential roof collapse include

- Visually deformed, cracked or split wood members
- Doors that pop open
- Doors or windows that become difficult to open

- Bowed utility pipes or conduit attached at ceiling
- Creaking, cracking or popping sounds
- New or quickly expanding existing wall or ceiling cracks

You may need to remove snow and ice from roofs and gutters. Removing snow should be done very cautiously. Snow shoveling is a very strenuous activity and there is also great danger of damaging the roof surface itself and creating more problems than what the snow itself presents. Homeowners should think about safety before trying to clear the snow from their roof. Here are some safety tips:

- When possible, use long-handled snow rakes or poles.
- If you must use a ladder, make certain that the base is securely anchored. Ask a friend, neighbor or adult family member to hold the ladder while you climb.
- Know where the snow is going to fall before clearing the area.
- Make certain not to contact electrical wires.
- If possible, do not attempt to clear the roof alone.
- If you are afraid of heights or think the job is too big for you, hire help.

Help Your Neighbors

If someone you know is elderly or dependent on life-sustaining equipment, you may want to reach out to them to ensure their needs are met during severe winter weather and possible power outages.

- Help them stock a home disaster kit including a flashlight and extra batteries, a battery-operated radio, bottled water, non-perishable foods, essential medicines, and extra blankets or sleeping bags.
- Check on them after a storm or power outage. Register them as a special needs customer with their utility so they will become a priority customer. Notify others who could provide help such as neighbors, relatives, nearby friends and local emergency responders such as the fire department.
- Have a list of emergency numbers readily available.

Stay in Touch

Listen to the radio, watch news reports, and check the internet for the latest conditions and forecasts. Travel advisories, travel bans, and parking restrictions are issued to protect citizens and assist emergency responders and highway crews.

A TRAVEL BAN means the roads are officially closed. Only emergency travel is allowed (police, ambulance, fire, doctors, nurses, etc.). Non-emergency travelers may be cited for a violation of law when traveling during a travel ban.

NO UNNECESSARY TRAVEL means that hazardous driving conditions do exist and no unnecessary travel should take place.

A PARKING BAN means no parking is permitted in designated areas. Vehicles parked in restricted areas during a parking ban are subject to towing at the owners expense.

SUMMARY

The topics discussed are only a few of the situations and problems you may encounter. Be careful when operating generators and snowblowers, make a family disaster/emergency plan, make a disaster supplies kit, be careful on the roads, protect your children and pets, winterize

your vehicle, don't overexert yourself when shoveling, be aware of hypothermia, have your chimney cleaned, have working smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers, drive carefully. So many things to consider but all are essential in keeping you safe this winter.

Visit www.LancasterOEM.org for more information.