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Connelly Law Offices, Ltd.

Certified Elder Law Attorney

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

PREPARE FOR COLD WEATHER EMERGENCIES

1. Have your **heating system** inspected on a yearly basis. If your furnace breaks down during a cold spell or a major storm, the temperatures in your home could plummet fast. It could take days to get it fixed during peak emergency times.
2. Make sure you have **warm blankets, flashlights, a supply of water, and your cell phone is charged** in case of a winter power outage.
3. Put together an **emergency supply of canned goods** - tuna, salmon, and other foods that may not require heating. And purchase a hand can opener. Without electricity, your electric can opener will not work.
4. Purchase a **battery-powered radio** or a rechargeable crank style radio. This will allow you to hear weather reports and other storm related information.
5. Make sure your **medications are refilled** and you have enough on hand to get you through the storm. If you have a home health care service, plan ahead with them to establish emergency procedures and phone numbers should you need something.
6. Pre-arrange with someone to make **regular checks** on you in the event of a weather emergency. Do not try to ride out the storm without any supports in place.
7. If the heat goes out, do not turn on the gas stove for heat. You risk carbon monoxide poisoning and create a fire hazard.
8. If you begin to feel unsafe or ill, **call 911**. They may be delayed due to the storm but they will be aware that you need assistance.

UNDERSTAND WEATHER EMERGENCIES

Winter Weather Advisories are issued when snow, blowing snow, ice, sleet, or a combination of these wintry elements is expected but conditions should not be hazardous enough to meet Warning criteria. Be prepared for winter driving conditions and possible travel difficulties. Use caution when driving.

Winter Storm Watches are issued when conditions are favorable for a significant winter storm event. Heavy sleet, heavy snow, ice storms, blowing snow, or a combination of these events are possible.

Winter Storm Warnings are issued for a significant winter weather event including snow, ice, sleet, blowing snow, or a combination of these hazards. Travel will become difficult or impossible in some situations. Delay your travel plans until conditions improve.

A Blizzard Warning means that the following conditions are occurring or expected within the next 12 to 18 hours. 1) Snow and/or blowing snow reducing visibility to 1/4 mile or less for 3 hours or longer. AND. 2) Sustained winds of 35 mph or greater or frequent gusts to 35 mph or greater.

SPACE HEATER SAFETY

If you are using a portable electric heaters to warm up those hard to heat areas of the house, make sure they are clean and the wires are not frayed or loose.

Buildups of paper or clothing can be potential fuel for a portable heater fire so clear out plenty of space. A good rule of thumb for clearance around a portable heater is **three feet** or more.

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SMOKE DETECTORS



We all know how important it is to change the batteries in your smoke detector, but did you know that smoke detectors must be replaced every 10 years?

Here's how to find out if your smoke detector needs to be replaced:

1. Remove the smoke detector from the ceiling.
2. Look on the back of the device for the date of manufacture.
3. Remember that smoke detectors should be replaced 10 years from the date of manufacture.
4. If it's less than 10 years old, put the smoke detector back on the ceiling or wall.
5. Test the batteries on your smoke detectors at least once a month. Simply push the test button and make sure your alarms sound when tested.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS



Carbon Monoxide detectors should be replaced every 5 to 7 years.

The detecting components will lose their effectiveness

after that time and may no longer detect carbon monoxide.

Again, look on the back of the device for the date of manufacture. If that date is older than 5 to 7 years, that unit needs to be replaced in order to keep you safe.

GUARDING AGAINST HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia is classified as a drop in body temperature below 96 degrees and can be extremely dangerous if not detected early. Medical experts believe certain conditions such as stroke, severe arthritis and Parkinson's disease can block the body's response to cold, as can some medications. This makes seniors particularly susceptible to accidental hypothermia.



Even temperatures below 60-65 degrees can cause an internal drop in body temperature in seniors!

There are warning signs of hypothermia:

- Uncontrollable shivering
- Numbness Confusion, disorientation, drowsiness
- Stiff muscles
- Slurred speech
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Slow, irregular heartbeat
- Weak pulse
- Stumbling and loss of coordination

What do you do if you suspect someone may be suffering from hypothermia?

- Keep the person dry and warm with blanket
- DO NOT rub limbs to warm them—this could cause tissue damage and bleeding
- Encourage them to drink hot beverages that are free of caffeine or alcohol
- **Call 911**

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