

**Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**

Bill Richardson
Governor
John W. Wheeler
Cabinet Secretary

**Surviving Winter Weather Driving**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Beverly Allen

505-231-7197

beverly.allen@state.nm.us

SANTA FE, NM-As New Mexico braces for another onslaught of early winter weather, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) reminds drivers to prepare their cars and trucks for emergencies. Cabinet Secretary John W. Wheeler says that by having a winter emergency kit and preparing for winter driving conditions “you can protect yourself and your passengers.”

Wheeler is urging drivers to “check antifreeze levels, battery and ignition systems, brakes, exhaust system, all filters and to make sure the heater and defroster work. You should also ensure your tires have adequate tread. All weather radials are usually adequate for New Mexico’s winter driving conditions.”

Other guidelines recommend that you always have at least a half tank of gas in the winter season. You should have a winter emergency kit with a shovel, windshield scraper, small broom, flashlight, and battery powered radio, extra batteries, water, snack food, matches, extra hat, gloves and socks and a blanket. Additional items for emergency use include a first aid kit, pocket knife, necessary medications, a tow chain or rope, road salt or sand, booster cables, emergency flares and a fluorescent flag. When travelling with children or people with special needs make sure you pack adequate supplies for them.

More and more people “travel with the family pet so you should plan and prepare ahead of time for this member of the family, with an ID tag, collar, leash, food and water” says Wheeler. A pet carrier and favorite toy is recommended as a way to make your pet feel safe and calm.

If you must drive during severe winter weather travel during daylight and don’t travel alone if at all possible. Make sure you have extra cell phone batteries and keep others informed of your travel schedule. Stay on main roads and avoid any back road shortcuts. If you are trapped in a snowstorm, pull off the highway, turn your hazard lights on and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window. Remain in your vehicle where rescuers can find you. Run the engine and heater for ten minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, be sure you open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe.

Wheeler cautions that “you can exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion.” In extreme cold use road maps, seat covers and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket. Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews. Drink fluids to avoid dehydration. Be careful not to waste your gas or battery power. Balance electrical energy needs with your supply. Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.

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Wheeler also cautions that before leaving “always check the road conditions between your point of departure and your destination.” Travelers can call the NM Department of Transportation’s Road Information hot line by Dialing 511 or go to www.nmroads.com

The Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management was signed into law in 2007 by Governor Bill Richardson to enhance New Mexico’s ability to coordinate the state’s efforts for the prevention, preparedness and response and recovery for all hazards. The DHSEM also serves as the bridge between State and Federal Government and the cities and counties of New Mexico for homeland security and emergency management activities.

For more information on emergency kits visit www.ready.gov

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GLOSSARY OF WINTER WEATHER TERMS

Freezing Rain- rain that freezes when it hits the ground creating a coating of ice on roads, walk ways, trees and power lines.

Sleet-rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes moisture on roads that can freeze and become slippery.

Winter Storm Watch-a winter storm is possible in your area. Tune into your local radio or television station or NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Weather Radio or go to www.noaa.gov for details.

Blizzard Warning-sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 mph or greater and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.

Frost/Freeze Warning-below freezing temperatures are expected.