

# Winter Weather

## Tips for Citizens With Special Needs

Disabled citizens have special needs during periods of severe cold spells freezing or below freezing temperatures, ice and snow and low wind chills.

### Freezing Temperatures

If you must go outside during freezing or below freezing temperatures, we suggest the following to help retain the heat in your body.

- Several layers of clothes with scarves for your neck, head and chest.
- If possible, wear a pair of thermal gloves underneath a pair of mittens. This will allow you to manipulate the fingers while having the hand enveloped in warmth.
- Wear at least 2 pair of thick socks underneath lined boots.
- Keep your head covered with a thermal cap with earflaps.
- If in a wheelchair use a small lap blanket to wrap around your legs, tucking it in on the sides or underneath yourself to maintain heat to your stomach and lower extremities.
- Have the automobile warmed up before getting into it.
- Shorten the time you must spend outside.
- If you use a working assistance dog, have a blanket for him to sit or lay on in the vehicle. Also, use a dog coat for him to wear underneath his regular harness. Consider dog boots for his feet.

### Ice, Sleet and Freezing Rain

Ice, sleet and freezing rain are very dangerous for those who use mobility aides for walking or for guiding their directional path. We suggest the following:

- Wheelchair users can purchase pneumatic tires for better traction during the winter months. A less expensive alternative is standard dirt bicycle tires found in bicycle shops.
- Have ramps cleared of ice by using standard table salt or cat litter. Rock salt is poisonous to working assistance dogs and can also be slippery depending on the type of mobility aide you are using.
- If using canes, walkers, forearm cuffs or a wheelchair, remember the freezing rain will stick to these aides and make the metal parts especially slippery and very cold to the touch. You may wish to use gripper-driving gloves.

- When you transfer back into your automobile, remove the tires from your wheelchair and shake the debris and ice off them before putting them in your vehicle.
- When you return home, as soon as possible, wipe down your tire rims and other metal parts that may have any salt or other chemicals from deicing them. They may rust the metal parts.
- If using mobility aids and crossing crosswalks, be very alert to oncoming traffic as they may not be able to stop in time due to the ice and low visibility with sleet and freezing rain.

### **Snow and Low Wind Chills**

With snow there can come low wind chills bringing with it severe frostbite potential. This is especially dangerous for those wheelchair users that are paralyzed from either the chest or waist down. Other disabling conditions limit sensory abilities and heat maintenance in individuals, so we suggest the following:

- Wear several layers of clothing with mittens over gloves on your hands. Use lined boots as footwear.
- Keep your neck, chest and head covered if you must go out for short periods.
- If you use a working assistance dog, have him wear a dog coat and consider boots for his paws. Dogs can also suffer from hypothermia and frostbite.
- If you become chilled while outside go back inside and warm up slowly. Do not jump into a hot bath as you may go into shock.
- Snow is dangerous for citizens using wheelchairs. If you are not accustomed to heavy wheeling, be very careful, the added exertion could cause you to have a heart attack or stroke.
- Limit your exposure to snow and wind chills.
- Check feet, pelvic areas and hands for circulation problems. With wheelchair users this is important, as feeling may be limited or not present.