

Get Ready for Severe

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by Brenda Kleinjan

SOUTH DAKOTA AND WESTERN MINNESOTA have had their fair share of severe weather in the past couple of years.

From tornadoes to high wind events to ice storms and blizzards, Mother Nature knows how to dish it out with a vengeance. Having an advanced warning to her fickle behavior can be essential in keeping you and your family safe.

“The weather doesn’t tend to be too cooperative most of the time,” said Amy Parkin, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s Aberdeen, S.D. office.

One of the best ways to get that advanced warning is through a weather radio equipped with SAME (Specific Area Message Encoding) coding. (SAME encoding allows weather radio users to program the radio to receive messages for specific geographical areas such as counties or portions of counties.)

“The reason we promote weather radios so highly is because it’s the quickest way to get the information. When we issue a watch or warning from our computer, it goes to the radio instantly,” said Parkin.

The radios have an audible alarm and many also include a lighted alarm to alert people of

weather events. Because the radios receive the information instantly from the NWS transmitters, there is no delay in getting the emergency information out through traditional broadcast outlets.

In addition to conveying the standard information about severe weather watches and warnings that are typical in the region, the radios can also send other emergency information such as Amber Alerts for abducted or endangered children and warnings about hazardous spills.

In addition to making sure their households are equipped with weather radios, Parkin said general awareness plays a role in being prepared. “Most people who live up here are pretty used to the fact that anything can happen at anytime. They need to pay attention to the weather – both in the summer and winter. We have stuff that can pop up pretty fast,” Parkin said.

“In the winter, the main thing people need to remember is to be prepared. Have everything in your car that you need and pay attention to the weather,” Parkin said. “If you’re going to be out traveling, have extra food, blankets and clothing in your car so you can keep yourself warm until someone finds you.”



Weather

Generators

Storms in the past couple of years have led many people to invest in backup generators for their homes and farms.

You can use a portable generator to supply electricity to your appliances if an emergency exists during a power outage. But if used improperly, they can kill you and the people who are restoring power to your building. They also can damage the appliances you connect.

When choosing a generator, it's important to get the right size generator to run the essentials. However, the essentials aren't everything one normally has plugged in.

Generator sizes vary. Common units can be from 8 to 14 horsepower and capable of handling from 4,000 to 8,400 watts (including starting surge requirements). Prices may range from \$800 to \$3,000.

Another important consideration is the safe use and operation of generators.

Always read the manufacturer's instructions.

Connecting a generator to the main electrical supply for your house requires the services of a qualified, licensed electrician. Installing the connection and switch can cost \$600 to \$1,000.

Before connecting the generator to your household circuit, notify your electric cooperative.

Once installed, a generator needs to be run periodically. Check with the owner's manual of your generator, but generators should typically be run either monthly or every third month.

Before transferring the electric load to a generator, the generator must be brought up to speed.

One final reminder: the quality of electricity generated by standby generators may damage sensitive electronic equipment such as home electronics and computers. Use a quality surge protector to protect your equipment or simply unplug the devices while operating the generator.

If you have any questions, contact the experts at your local electric cooperative.



Prepare For An Emergency

In Vehicles:

- Mobile phone, charger, batteries
- Blankets/sleeping bags
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Knife
- High-calorie, nonperishable food
- Extra clothing to keep dry
- Large empty can to use as emergency toilet.
Tissues and paper towels for sanitary purposes
- Small can and waterproof matches to melt snow for drinking water
- Sack of sand or cat litter for traction
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Tool kit
- Tow rope
- Battery booster cables
- Water container
- Compass and road maps

Keep your gas tank near full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines. Avoid traveling alone. Let someone know your timetable and primary and alternate routes.

A Disaster Supplies Kit Should Include:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person, per day)
- Food that won't spoil
- One change of clothing and shoes per person
- Portable radio
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Extra set of car keys
- Cash and a credit card
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members
- One blanket or sleeping bag per person
- First-aid kit
- Prescription medicines
- Emergency tools
- Battery-powered NWR

What to Listen For:

The National Weather Service issues outlooks, watches, warnings and advisories for all winter weather hazards. Here's what they mean and what to do. Use the information below to make an informed decision on your risk and what actions should be taken. Remember to listen to your local officials' recommendations and to NOAA Weather Radio for the latest winter storm information.

OUTLOOK: Winter storm conditions are possible in the next two to five days. Stay tuned to local media for updates.

WATCH: Winter storm conditions are possible within the next 36 to 48 hours. Prepare now!

WARNING: Life-threatening severe winter conditions have begun or will begin within 24 hours. Act now!

ADVISORY: Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. If you are cautious, these situations should not be life threatening.