

The National Weather Service states there is an increasing potential for a winter storm impacting our county Thursday Night and Friday morning. Snowfall is expected to be up to one inch in costal and southern portions of the county and one to three inches in northern Santa Rosa. Although precipitation will be ending later in the day Friday, subfreezing low temperatures Friday night suggests that lingering moisture on roads and overpasses will refreeze maintaining slick spots and making for hazardous driving conditions like black ice.

Actions Taken by the County

In preparation for the low temperatures, Santa Rosa County has taken the following steps:

The emergency operations center is at a level three or monitoring phase.

Emergency management and public works staff are on standby to respond as needed.

Public works has sand on standby to place on roadways. Any road closures will be announced as they occur.

The American Red Cross is on standby to open a public warming shelter if needed for any long-term power outages.

There are currently no plans to close county offices, the court system or public schools. A decision on office/school closures is expected by 2 p.m. Thursday. The public is urged to monitor the local media for the latest information.

General Safety

- Citizens are urged to remember the five P's of cold weather- protect **people**, protect **pets**, protect **plants**, protect **pipes** and practice **fire safety**.

- In the event of long-term power outages, be extremely careful when using generators, lanterns, gas powered appliances or when cooking on charcoal grills or gas grills. These appliances produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide that can cause poisoning in only a matter of minutes. Equipment or appliances that produce carbon monoxide should never be used indoors. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not stop carbon monoxide build-up.

Cold Weather Shelters

- If the temperature cannot be maintained at your home, make temporary arrangements to stay elsewhere, including with friends and family. Two cold weather shelters for the homeless and those who are not able to maintain heat in their homes through Friday night:

Ferris Hill Baptist Church, 6848 Chaffin Street in Milton

Billory Baptist Church, 8162 Stillwater Cove in Holley

Wednesday night, those who would like to stay at the shelter must arrive between 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. No one will be admitted after 8:30 p.m. unless brought in by law enforcement. The shelter will close at 7 a.m. on Thursday.

Thursday night ONLY, both shelters will open at 5 p.m. and the shelter will close at 9 a.m. on Friday morning.

Black Ice Safety

Black ice forms when the air temperature is warmer than pavement, which causes moisture to rapidly freeze and create a thin, transparent layer of ice on the roadway. It can be one of the most dangerous conditions on roads as it is invisible and can catch drivers off guard and at full speed, resulting in loss of vehicle control. Drivers can increase safety by observing the following tips:

- Be aware that black ice is almost invisible.
- Be especially careful on bridges, overpasses and tunnels and in early morning when the air temperature is rising faster than the pavement temperature.
- Never brake while driving on ice. Applying pressure to your brakes while on ice will cause a vehicle to skid. Brake only during your approach.
- Keep your distance. The distance needed to stop on ice is twice as long as under normal driving circumstances. Keep at least a three-car distance from the vehicle directly in front of you.

General Driving Safety

Snow and ice on most roadways is expected. Santa Rosa County Emergency Management asks residents to take special precautions when driving:

Drive according to the conditions on the road. Remember bridges, overpasses and infrequently travel roads will freeze first.

Allow extra time to get to your destination.

Don't use cruise control on icy roads.

Reduce your speed and leave plenty of room to stop. There should be at least three times the normal amount of space between you and the car in front of you.

To avoid skidding brake gently if your wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake.

More cold weather tips and information on what to do before, during and after a wide variety of disasters can be found the county's disaster guide available online at <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/emergency/disasterprep.html>.