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(Neb.)-Gov. Dave Heineman Discusses Winter Weather Safety Tips

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 12/26/2012 11:52 AM

(LINCOLN)-With the holidays here and winter weather settling in, Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman says this is a good time to highlight several safety tips. The Governor recently visited with State Patrol Colonel David Sankey, Department of Roads Director Randy Peters, and Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Assistant Director Al Berndt regarding safety procedures.

Governor Heineman says, "During a winter storm, blowing and drifting snow can cause reduced visibility and affect road conditions. The best way to keep your family and yourself safe is by being prepared for winter weather before it strikes."

One of the primary concerns is the winter weather's ability to knock out heat, power and communications services, sometimes for days at a time. Heavy snowfall and extreme cold can immobilize an entire region. Listen to weather forecasts regularly, and check your emergency supplies whenever a period of extreme cold is predicted. Have a week's worth of food and safety supplies available at home. Remember, your primary concern is staying warm.

"One of the essential parts of the emergency management discipline is preparedness," said Asst. Dir. Berndt. "We prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Make a family emergency plan so you and your loved ones are ready."

Before planning any kind of trip this winter, it is important to monitor local media outlets and check 511 the Nebraska Advanced Traveler Information System. Most Nebraskans are familiar with the statewide 511 system for road conditions. It provides 24-hour weather and travel information by simply dialing 511. It is free of charge whether you use your cell phone or landline. Neighboring states are available on the system as well. If outside the state, use 800-906-0069 to get Nebraska's system. If on your pc or mobile device, the web site is www.511nebraska.gov.

"The Department of Roads is prepared to respond as winter weather comes calling," said Dir. Randy Peters. "Snowplows operate around-the-clock on the state's heavily traveled highways, based on the actual conditions at the time it snows."

During a winter storm, the Nebraska State Patrol works closely with the Department of Roads to determine road conditions with the goal of keeping roads open. However, winter weather conditions often force road closures. This is for the safety of the motoring public and to allow snow removal crews to clear roadways so that travel can resume. "Awareness plays a crucial role in safe travel during the winter months," said Colonel David Sankey. "By monitoring weather and road conditions, motorists can make an informed decision before departing on a trip."

The Nebraska State Patrol and Nebraska Department of Roads offer a few safety tips:

--Always wear your seat belt.

--Never drive faster than conditions allow.

--Never use cruise control in wet, slick, or snow packed conditions.

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--Increase following distance, so that you can react to other vehicles around you.
--Drive with your headlights on and make sure all vehicle lights and windows are clear of snow.
--Travel during daylight hours and use well-traveled routes, giving yourself plenty of time to reach your destination.
--Let others know where you are going, when you will arrive, and what route you will be taking.
--If you do become stranded while traveling, stay with your car until help arrives. Wind chill and freezing temperatures can be life threatening.
--If you become trapped in a winter storm while driving, stay in your car. Run your engine for a few minutes every hour to reheat the interior of your car, making sure your exhaust pipe is not blocked. Keep a window cracked to prevent the buildup of carbon monoxide. Tie a very visible item such as a red handkerchief to the highest point on your vehicle, often the antenna. This will keep you visible to rescuers.
--Motorists should have a winter weather survival kit in the trunk or cargo area of their vehicle. It should include an ice scraper, shovel, small bag of sand or abrasive material. A flashlight, extra batteries and a portable radio. Blankets or sleeping bag, an extra set dry clothing, and nonperishable snacks, such as high energy or dehydrated foods. Jumper cables, an empty coffee can or plastic container, brightly colored cloth (red is best) to attach to car to signal help is needed, and fully charged cell phone.
More information can be found at http://www.dor.state.ne.us/rca/wz/winter-page.htm. Travelers in need of non-emergency roadside assistance, or motorists wanting to report a reckless or impaired driver are encouraged to utilize the Nebraska State Patrol Highway Helpline by dialing *55 from their cell phone when safe to do so, or 800-525-5555 from any landline.

--Office of Governor Dave Heineman

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