



Don't be Sparked by a Winter Storm

It strikes again! A winter storm has dumped over 10 feet of snow on the eastern part of the United States and over 23 states are being impacted. Indeed, that is some deep snow, even for us hardy Minnesotans. Most of us have experienced a storm or two, and driven in weather we shouldn't have. And, luckily, we made it home safe only to exclaim, "I'll never do that again!"

The point I wish to make is that winter storms can bring new ELECTRICAL hazards and may require other actions on our part to be safe, to survive, to live to tell the story. Why? So we can head out on the road again to only come back home and exclaim, "I'll never do that again!"

So, when our next winter storm strikes, and it will, take these actions . . . and stay home!

- When cleaning out your yard, don't pile the snow near the power lines. Children might want to play on these large snow piles and be too close to the power lines. Just like we don't want trampolines underneath a power line, nor do we want a large snow pile. And, keep your equipment at least 10 feet away, too.
- If it does storm and icy conditions bring down lines, stay away from them. Just as in a summer storm, downed lines can still be energized, or they can often become energized.
- When power goes out, it often comes back in spikes. This can damage electronics. Keep your electronics safe by unplugging them when the power goes out. Leave one lamp or switch on as a signal for when your power returns.
- In the case you do lose power and heat, you may need to be concerned with pipes freezing. To prevent water pipes from freezing, keep faucets turned on slightly, so water drips from the tap. Know how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts, too.
- If you have underground cabinets (the "green boxes") in your yard, know where they are located so you don't damage one when removing snow with a skid steer or other equipment. Instead, you can carefully clear out the snow around with a shovel. It also helps the co-op find it, too, if they have to service the equipment in cabinet.
- If you need to use a portable generator, then use it safely. From Electrical Safety Foundation International, they state, "portable generators are commonly used in the winter as a result of storm-induced power outages. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 50% of all portable generator-related carbon monoxide deaths occur during the winter months (November - February)." Some key reminders are to never use a generator inside or in a garage and make sure to have working carbon monoxide detectors present.

*Prepared by Minnesota Rural Electric Association
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