

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**For More Information Contact**

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## **VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OFFERS SUGGESTIONS TO PREVENT INJURIES AFTER SNOW STORM**

(RICHMOND, Va.)— People in the areas affected by the recent snow storm will continue to face a number of hazards associated with cleanup activities. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers these tips to stay safe following a natural disaster.

### **Wear Protective Gear**

- Wear cold weather appropriate clothing like gloves, heavy coat and snow boots.
- Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise. Equipment such as chain saws, backhoes and snow blowers may cause ringing in the ears and subsequent hearing damage.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

### **Beware of Electrical Hazards**

- If snow/water is present anywhere near electrical circuits and electrical equipment, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- Never touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet, unless you are certain that the power is off.
- *Never* touch a downed power line.
- When using gasoline and diesel generators to supply power to a building, switch the main breaker or fuse on the service panel to the off position prior to starting the generator.
- If clearing or other work must be performed near a downed power line, contact the utility company to discuss de-energizing and grounding or shielding of power lines. Extreme caution is necessary when moving ladders and other equipment near overhead power lines to avoid inadvertent contact.

### **Avoid Carbon Monoxide**

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is poisonous to breathe. During snow cleanup, operate all gasoline-powered devices such as generators outdoors and never bring them indoors. This will help to ensure your safety from carbon monoxide poisoning.

### **Prevent Muscle and Bone Injury**

Special attention is needed to avoid back injuries associated with manual lifting and handling of debris and shoveling snow.

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To help prevent muscle and bone injury:

- Use teams of two or more to move bulky objects.
- Avoid lifting any material that weighs more than 50 pounds.
- Use proper automated-assist lifting devices.
- Use caution or seek professional assistance when removing fallen trees, cleaning up debris or using equipment, such as chain saws.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

### **Candle Safety**

- Use a flashlight instead of a candle whenever possible.
- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire such as clothing, books, curtains, or flammable liquids.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily and are made from a material that can't burn.
- Keep candles out of reach of children.
- Try to avoid carrying a lit candle.
- *Never* use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment.

### **Reduce Risk of Heat Exhaustion and Cold Temperature Injuries**

While cleaning up after the snow storm, you are at risk for developing health problems from working in cold environments.

- Wear rubber boots.
- Ensure that clothing and boots have adequate insulation.
- Take frequent breaks out of the water.
- Change into dry clothing when possible.

### **Food Safety Precautions**

- Perishable foods including meats, dairy products and eggs that haven't been refrigerated for more than two hours should be discarded because they are no longer safe to consume.
- Foods that have been contaminated by flooding should also be discarded.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, pots and pans, dishes and inside refrigerators, etc.

For more information about how to protect yourself and your family before, during and after natural disasters, visit [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) or the Virginia Department of Emergency Management's Web site at [www.readyvirginia.gov](http://www.readyvirginia.gov).

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