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MEMA ISSUES WINTER POWER OUTAGE SAFETY TIPS

FRAMINGHAM, MA – “Severe Winter Weather, including heavy wet snow, sleet, freezing rain and high winds, has the potential to cause power outages throughout the Commonwealth,” warns Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce. “The weight of a one-half inch ice build-up can be enough to snap tree limbs, causing them to fall and bring down power lines disrupting electrical service.”

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has the following tips for dealing with a possible winter power outage:

- Check flashlights and portable radios to ensure that they are working, and you have extra batteries. A radio is an important source of weather and emergency information during a storm.
- The use of candles is strongly discouraged.
- Have sufficient heating fuel, as regular sources may be cut off. Have emergency heating equipment and fuel (a gas fireplace, wood burning stove or fireplace) so you can keep at least one room livable. Be sure the room is well ventilated.
- If utilizing an emergency generator, read, understand and follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Always operate emergency generators outdoors and away from any open window. Make sure your generator is properly grounded and installed as you may be liable for damage or injury to people and property that may result from improperly installed or operated equipment.
- Ensure that your Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors are working correctly and have fresh batteries. Check your outside fuel exhaust vents, making sure that they are not obstructed by snow or ice. Never use cooking equipment intended for outside use indoors as a heat source or cooking device.
- If your water supply could be affected by a power outage (a well-water pump system), fill your bathtub and spare containers with water. Water in the bathtub should be used for sanitation purposes only, not as drinking water. Pouring a pail of water from the tub directly into the bowl can flush a toilet.

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- If pipes freeze, remove insulation, completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they are most exposed to the cold. A hand-held hair dryer, used with caution, also works well.
- Set your refrigerator and freezer to their coldest settings (remember to reset them back to normal once power is restored). During an outage, do not open the refrigerator or freezer door. Food can stay cold in a full refrigerator for up to 24 hours, and in a well-packed freezer for 48 hours (24 hours if it is half-packed). If you have medication that requires refrigeration, check with your pharmacist for guidance on proper storage during an extended outage.
- In order to protect against possible voltage irregularities that can occur when power is restored, you should unplug all sensitive electronic equipment, including TVs, stereo, VCR, microwave oven, computer, cordless telephone, answering machine and garage door opener. Be sure to leave one light on, so you will know when power is restored.
- Review the process for manually operating an electric garage door.
- If you lose your heat, seal off unused rooms by stuffing towels in the cracks under the doors. At night, cover windows with extra blankets or sheets. Food provides the body with energy for producing its own heat.
- Check with elderly or disabled relatives and neighbors to ensure their safety.
- Be extra cautious if you go outside to inspect for damage after a storm. Downed or hanging electrical wires can be hidden by snowdrifts, trees or debris, and could be live. Never attempt to touch or move downed lines. Keep children and pets away from them.
- Do not touch anything power lines are touching, such as tree branches or fences. Always assume a downed line is a live line. Call your utility company to report any outage-related problem.
- Make sure you always have a well-stocked Winter Home Emergency Supply Kit that includes flashlights, portable radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, bottled water, non-perishable food and a manual can opener.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Winter Preparedness, go to the MEMA website at www.mass.gov/mema.