

## Onondaga County "Be Prepared" Fact Sheet:

# Hazard-Specific Information

**H**azards specific to Onondaga County include weather-related disasters, fires, carbon monoxide and earthquakes. In any type of emergency, whether it affects your home or the entire community, planning ahead will help you and your family cope during a difficult time.

### Severe Weather: Thunderstorms, Flash Flooding & Tornadoes

#### In a thunderstorm:

- Avoid handling metal, electrical equipment, telephones, water faucets and sinks because lightning can follow the wires and pipes. Be especially careful with televisions.
- If there is a severe thunderstorm, take cover immediately in a stable facility, but avoid trees.

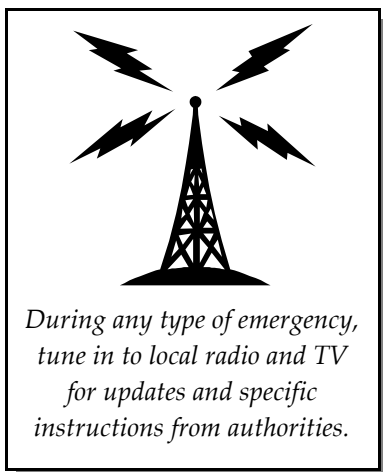
#### In a flash flood:

- Seek high ground. Never attempt to drive your vehicle through standing water.

#### In a tornado:

- Go to your basement or the lowest point of your residence. If you cannot find shelter, take cover in a ditch or other recessed area.

If you are asked to evacuate, do so immediately.



### National Weather Service Terms:

- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** There is potential for thunderstorms to form that can produce wind gusts greater than 58 mph and/or hail greater than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** A severe thunderstorm is occurring.
- **Tornado Watch:** A tornado could form in the next few hours.
- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado has been reported and/or the National Weather Service radar has detected a tornado or tornadic signature.
- **Flash Flood Watch:** Localized flooding due to heavy rainfall is possible.
- **Flash Flood Warning:** Localized flooding due to heavy rainfall is imminent.
- **Freezing Rain Advisory:** Minor accumulation of ice due to freezing rain is expected.
- **Winter Weather Advisory:** A Minor accumulation of snow, sleet and freezing rain is expected.
- **Snow Advisory:** Accumulations of one to four inches expected within a 12-hour period.
- **Blizzard Warning:** Strong winds, blinding driven snow and dangerous wind chill are expected in the next several hours.
- **Winter Storm Watch:** Significant accumulation of snow and/or ice is possible within 36 hours.
- **Winter Storm Warning:** A storm with six or more inches of snow/sleet/freezing rain within a 24-hour period is expected.

See the National Weather Service website at [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov) for more information

## Weather Disasters, cont.

### Winter Weather

Dangerous winter weather includes winter storms and blizzards. These can involve a combination of heavy snow, ice accumulation and dangerous wind chills.

#### **Dress warmly and stay dry:**

Wear hats, scarves, layers, and water-repellent coats. Wear mittens instead of gloves; they are warmer.

#### **Cover your mouth:**

Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors.

#### **Avoid overexertion:**

Take your time while shoveling snow or pushing a car. Stretch before you go out and drink plenty of non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated fluids.

#### **Car safety:**

Be sure to clear snow from your tail pipe before you start your car to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Also see carbon monoxide section on page 4.

#### **Safe heating:**

Many fires and emergencies are caused every year in the county from unsafe heating. Consider the following.

- If you do not have heat, contact your building owner or if heat is not restored, contact Niagara Mohawk at 1-800-642-4272.
- Fuel-burning items (such as furnaces, boilers, hot water heaters, and clothes dryers) should be working, ventilated, and inspected by a professional regularly in order to prevent unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Electric heaters should be used with extreme caution to prevent shock, fire, and burns.
- Materials near heaters should be kept at least three feet from the heat source to prevent fire.
- Gas ovens and burners should never be used to heat your home.

## Coastal Storms

### **Nor'easters:**

Nor'easters are extreme tropical cyclones that can cause heavy rain/snow, strong winds and coastal flooding.

- Nor'easters may occur at any time of the year but are most common during fall and winter months (September through April).
- Evacuations are unlikely for nor'easters but shelters may be opened during severe storms to offer people relief.

### **Tropical Storms:**

A tropical storm is a tropical cyclone with sustained winds between 39 and 73 mph.

- Tropical Storm Watch: Issued when there is a threat of tropical storm conditions in 24 – 36 hours.
- Tropical Storm Warning: Tropical storm expected within 24 hours.

### **Hurricanes:**

A hurricane is a tropical cyclone with sustained winds of 74 mph or greater.

- Hurricane season is the time of year when hurricanes are expected to form in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. It lasts from June through November.
- During hurricanes, residents in hurricane evacuation zones may be asked to evacuate. The County will communicate specific evacuation and sheltering information to the public through local media.
- A Hurricane Watch is issued when there is a threat of hurricane conditions in 24-36 hours.

### **Some measures to help you weather major storms:**

- Shutter or board windows.
- Secure outdoor objects such as lawn furniture or garbage cans that could blow away and cause damage or injury.
- Stay clear of downed power lines.
- In extreme conditions, consider shutting off power and appliance gas switches to prevent damage to your appliances.

## Weather Disasters, cont.

### Extreme Heat

During the summer months, people are especially vulnerable to the hazards created by hot weather. Asphalt, concrete and metal absorb heat and make it difficult for the city to cool down. This is known as the “heat island effect.”

Heat waves are particularly dangerous for children, the elderly and the infirm. Please make sure to check on your neighbors and offer them assistance.

The terms listed below describe the illnesses that extreme heat can cause. Heat-related illnesses can become medical emergencies – call 911, especially in the case of heat stroke.

**Heat Cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms resulting from heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe heat-related illness, they are an early signal that the body is having trouble coping with heat and should be treated immediately with rest and fluids. Stretching or direct pressure can also reduce cramps. Unless very severe, heat cramps do not require emergency medical attention.

**Heat Exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion occurs when body fluids are lost through heavy sweating due to vigorous exercise or working in a hot, humid place. Symptoms include: sweating; pale, clammy skin; fatigue; headache; dizziness; shallow breaths; and a weak or rapid pulse. Victims of heat exhaustion are tired but not confused. The condition should be treated by resting in a cool area, drinking water or electrolyte solutions, and elevating the feet 12 inches. Further medical treatment may be necessary in severe cases. If not treated, the victim’s condition may escalate to heat stroke. If the victim does not respond to basic treatment, seek medical attention.

**Heat Stroke:** Heat stroke is also called “sunstroke”. It occurs when the victim’s temperature control system, which produces sweat to cool the body, stops working. The skin is flushed, hot and dry, and body temperature may be elevated. The victim may also be confused, develop seizures, breathe shallowly and have a weak or rapid pulse. This is the most serious heat-related illness and people exhibiting these symptoms should seek emergency medical attention.

### Heat Terms:

- **Heat Wave:** Prolonged period of excessive heat often combined with excessive humidity.
- **Heat Index:** Number of degrees Fahrenheit that indicates how it feels when relative humidity is factored into air temperature.
- **Heat Advisory:** When the heat index exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit for up to three hours a day for two consecutive days.
- **Excessive Heat Warning:** When the heat index is expected to exceed 115 degrees Fahrenheit or when it exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit for three or more hours for two consecutive days.
- **Excessive Heat Watch:** A long-term alert for excessive heat.
- **Ozone Advisory:** Issued when ozone levels are expected to exceed 0.08 parts per million of ozone over an eight-hour period. People should limit their outdoor activity and those with respiratory problems (such as asthma) should be especially careful and avoid strenuous activity.

### Follow These Tips To Stay Cool:

- Stay out of the sun. When in the sun, wear sunscreen (at least SPF 15).
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothes that cover as much skin as possible to prevent sunburn.
- Give your body a chance to adjust to extreme temperature changes.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated fluids.
- Use shades or awnings.
- Consider going to public pools and air-conditioned stores and malls.

# Fire

If your smoke detector goes off or if you notice a fire, remain calm. Do not try to fight a fire, get out.

- Have a family fire escape plan, with two escape routes for everyone and an outside meeting place. Practice the plan.
- If your clothes catch on fire, stop, drop, and roll to smother the flames.
- If you live in a high-rise dwelling, and the fire is not in your apartment, stay in your apartment rather than entering smoke-filled hallways.
- In high-rise office buildings, follow your building's evacuation plan. Monitor the PA system for further instructions.
- If a fire breaks out in your house or non-fireproof apartment building, get out as quickly as possible.
- Feel doors with the back of your hand before you open them. If they are hot, find another way out. Stay as close to the floor as possible – smoke and heat rise and the air is clearer and cooler near the floor. Close doors behind you.
- If you are unable to get out, stay near a window and close to the floor. Close the door and stuff the bottom with a towel to avoid smoke. If possible, signal for help by waving a cloth or sheet outside the window.
- Call 911 from a safe place such as a neighbor's house.
- Do not stop to get anything.
- Do not use the elevator.
- To prevent fires, keep an ABC fire extinguisher and working smoke detectors in the house. Check batteries twice a year at daylight-saving times.
- Consider renter's insurance if you rent an apartment.

# Carbon Monoxide

Dangerous levels of carbon monoxide – a colorless and odorless gas – can be produced from improperly vented furnaces, plugged or cracked chimneys, water heaters, fireplaces, stoves, and tail pipes. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are flu-like and may include headache, dizziness, fatigue, and vomiting.

## If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Call 911.
- Open windows.
- Get the victim to fresh air immediately.
- Call Niagara Mohawk.

# Earthquakes

Although earthquakes are uncommon in New York State, tremors occasionally occur and residents should be prepared. Note that after an earthquake your utilities may be disrupted.

## In the event of an earthquake:

- Drop to the floor.
- Take cover under a solid piece of furniture or next to an interior wall. Cover your head and neck with your arms.
- Hold on to a sturdy piece of furniture and be prepared to move with it. Stay where you are until the shaking stops.
- Be prepared for after-shocks, which often follow an earthquake.

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*These materials are adapted from the New York City Office of Emergency Management (NYCOEM) "Ready New York" brochure. Onondaga County greatly appreciates NYCOEM's permission to adapt their format for the benefit of our citizens.*

**For more information, call Onondaga County  
Department of Emergency Management at  
435-2525**



Peter P. Alberti, Commissioner  
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