



Extreme Weather TASK FORCE

Staying Ahead of the Weather

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NEWS CONFERENCE ADVISORY

EXTREME WEATHER TASK FORCE WINTER SAFETY & BLANKET DRIVE KICKOFF

- WHEN:** 10 a.m., Wednesday, October 24, 2018
- WHERE:** El Paso Fire Station #5
[400 Revere Street](#)
- WHY:** Each winter El Paso's elderly and needy families are at-risk for cold weather-related illness and death.
- SPEAKERS:**
- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Grace Ortiz
APS Community Initiatives
EWTF Chair | Welcome & EWTF mission |
| John Fausett
National Weather Service | Winter Forecast |
| Lt. Juan Acuna
El Paso Fire Department | Home Fire Safety & Space Heaters |
| Eric Jimenez
City of El Paso Animal Services | Pet Safety |
| Dr. Hector Ocaranza
City of El Paso, Dept. of Public Health | Winter Health/Safety |
| Margie Resendez
211 | Blanket Requests/Criteria |
| Yvette Lugo
Area Agency on Aging | Buddy System |
| Marisela Perez
Project Bravo, Director | Winter Weatherization Program |

As temperatures drop, so does the peril for the elderly and needy families in our community.

“Our goal is not simply to collect and distribute free blankets, we want to check on people and educate the community on how to stay safe in cold weather,” said Grace Ortiz, Extreme Weather Task Force Chair and Community Engagement Specialist with Adult Protective Services (APS.)

“Some of the poorest families we’ve seen, especially in the Colonias, don’t have any heat source in their homes,” said Ortiz. “It’s the elderly and the children who suffer the most.”

During the past two years, the Extreme Weather Task Force (EWTF) has collected and delivered 1,132 free blankets to the elderly and needy families in our community.

“Currently, we have only 200 blankets in stock,” said Ortiz. “Our inventory is low. In order to be able to fulfill the blanket requests, we are asking the community to donate new blankets.” The EWTF, along with the APS Silver Star Board received a grant from Walmart which will assist us in fulfilling some of the requests. However, we still need help from our great community.

To help save lives, the EWTF stresses use of the **“Buddy System.”** This simply involves having a trusted relative, friend or neighbor check in daily with an elderly or disabled person during a cold wave. A Buddy encourages an at-risk individual to stay warm by wearing layers of clothes, to eat well, drink plenty of fluids and heat their home safely. If there are errands to be done, the Buddy does them, or makes sure they get done.

Those most at-risk for hypothermia include: elderly people with inadequate food, clothing or heating; babies sleeping in cold bedrooms; children left unattended; adults under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs; mentally ill individuals; people who remain outdoors for long periods (the homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.)

New blanket donations can be dropped off any time at local fire stations or El Paso County Sheriff sub-stations. Corporate and monetary donations are welcome payable to the APS Silver Star Board. The mailing address is: Attention - Grace Ortiz, Adult Protective Services, 401 E. Franklin, Suite 350, El Paso, TX, 79901.

Those in need of a blanket (who meet EWTF criteria) should call 211.

For more information contact: Grace Ortiz at 915-834-5772 or graciela.ortiz@dfps.state.tx.us.

Tips for Preventing Hypothermia

- If you must be outside during cold weather, wear appropriate clothing:
 - A hat
 - A scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth
 - Sleeves that are snug at the wrist
 - Mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
 - Water-resistant coat and shoes
 - Several layers of loose-fitting clothing

Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Stay dry -- wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Also, avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing and fueling your automobile. These materials in contact with the skin greatly increase heat loss from the body.

- Eat well-balanced meals will help you stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic beverages -- they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages such as hot chocolate to help maintain your body temperature. If you have any dietary restrictions, ask your doctor.

Recognizing the Warnings Signs of Hypothermia

If you notice signs of hypothermia, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, the situation is an emergency, get medical attention right away.

Adults:

- Shivering, exhaustion
- Confusion, fumbling hands
- Memory loss, slurred speech
- Drowsiness

Infants:

- Bright red, cold skin
- Very low energy

Tips for Heating your Home Safely

If you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and remember these safety tips:

- Use fireplace, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.
- Do not burn paper in a fire place.
- Ensure adequate ventilation if you must use a kerosene heater.
- Do not place a space heater within three (3) feet of anything that may catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding, and never cover your space heater.
- Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- Never leave children unattended near a space heater.
- Make sure that the cord of an electric space heater is not a tripping hazard but do not run the cord under carpets or rugs.
- Avoid using extension cords to plug in your space heater.
- If your space heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, do not use it.
- Store a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- Protect yourself from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning by installing a battery-operated CO detector and never using generators, grills, camp stoves, or similar devices indoors.