Texas Electric Cooperatives
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KEEPSAFE

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Hypothermia: Learn the dangers, signs and treatment

A 29-year old man became buried in snow after his car got stuck on a snowy, rural Oregon road in the state's central Deschutes National Forest. He survived four days in the woods by lighting small fires. He tried hiking to safety but was too weak. The man retreated to his car and consumed his meager rations.

Twelve days later, passing snowmobilers saw a glint from the car, which was by then almost buried in snow. When they approached the car, they saw the victim's hand tapping on a window. He had lost nearly 20 pounds and was suffering from hypothermia.

Most cases of hypothermia are not this dramatic. Still, 50 percent of severe cases result in death.

What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia occurs when body temperature falls and the body loses heat faster than it produces heat. The condition is life threatening when the body's core temperature falls below 95°F. It does not require sub-zero temperatures, and can occur in unexpected places, such as in southern states and on summer days.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The signs of hypothermia vary from mild to severe cases. Mild cases of hypothermia occur when the body temperature falls, but remains about 90°F. Signs and symptoms of mild hypothermia include:

- Shivering
- The "umbles" – fumbles, grumbles, stumbles and mumbles
- Cool abdomen

Severe cases of hypothermia occur when body temperature falls below 90°F. Signs and symptoms of severe hypothermia include:

- Shivering has stopped
- Muscles are rigid and stiff
- Skin is ice cold and looks blue
- Victim appears dead, or nearly so

First aid and emergency care books usually tell you what to do, but seldom explain why to do it. Here are treatment methods and the reasons behind them.

- Try to block the victim from the wind so less heat escapes.
- Be as gentle as possible. Rough handling of a victim can cause heartbeat irregularities and death. In unresponsive victims, check breathing and circulation for 30 to 45 seconds.
- If the victim isn't breathing and shows no signs of circulation, start CPR, if you are trained and certified. Insulate the victim by applying blankets and extra dry clothing.
- Do not give the victim alcoholic or caffeinated drinks because they increase the likelihood of dehydration. Do not allow the victim to use tobacco or nicotine, because these substances constrict blood vessels, which increases the risk of frostbite in subfreezing temperatures.

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Merry Christmas

Christmas tree safety

As you deck the halls this holiday season, be fire smart. A small fire that spreads to a Christmas tree can grow large very quickly.

Picking the tree

- If you have an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled, certified, or identified by the manufacturer as fire retardant.
- Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.

Placing the tree

- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1–2" from the base of the trunk.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.

Lighting the tree

- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Connect no more than three strands of mini string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

After Christmas

- Get rid of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the home. Check with your local community to find a recycling program. Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

— NFPA Public Education Division

(hypothermia continued from page 1)

Also, do not massage the skin of the extremities. Skin-rubbing suppresses shivering and dilates blood vessels, which results in heat loss.

- Keep the victim at rest. A horizontal position is best: This helps prevent shock and makes it easier for the victim's heart to maintain blood flow to the brain. This position is especially important for victims taken from the water.
- The best warming method in mild hypothermia cases is allowing the victim to shiver inside dry insulation. Give the victim high-energy drinks if they are alert and able to swallow. Sugary fluids provide energy to sustain shivering.
- Do not give hot drinks. They taste good and may give a psychological boost, but they have no warming effect. Hot drinks signal the brain to send more blood to the skin, which leads to some heat loss.
- Try to avoid using heated objects, such as heating pads and packs. These objects may stop the desirable effects of shivering, and hypothermic skin is very sensitive to heat and is easily burned.

— Alton L. Thygerson
National Safety Council, Safety+Health

Mark your calendars...

2010 Loss Control Conference
March 17 – 19

Scholarship Golf Tournament
March 16

Renaissance Hotel, Austin

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2010 TEC LOSS CONTROL SCHOOLS *(29 Schools)*

Metering School (Merkel)	January 5 – 8
Transformer School (Gilmer)	January 12 - 15
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Gonzales)	January 26 – 29
Transformer School (Livingston)	February 2 - 5
Transformer School (Merkel)	February 23 – 26
Advanced Pole Climbing School (Gonzales)	February 23 - 26
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Tahoka)	March 9 – 12
Underground School (Quitman)	March 22 – 26
Metering School (Sulphur Springs)	April 6 – 9
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Livingston)	April 13 – 16
Basic Pole Climbing School (Gonzales)	April 20 – 23
Hotline 1 – 4 School (Henderson)	April 26 – 30
Basic Pole Climbing School (Gilmer)	May 4 - 7
Hotline 1 – 4 School (Merkel)	May 10 - 14
Transformer School (Gonzales)	May 18 – 21
Transformer School (Tahoka)	May 25 – 28
Metering School (Livingston)	June 8 – 11
Underground School (Gonzales)	June 14 - 18
Basic Pole Climbing School (Tahoka)	June 22 – 25
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Merkel)	June 29 – July 2
Troubleshooting School (Gonzales)	July 20 – 23
Metering School (Fredericksburg)	August 10 - 13
Troubleshooting School (Livingston)	August 24 - 27
Hotline 1 – 4 School (Gonzales)	Aug 30 – Sept 3
Underground School (McGregor)	September 13 - 17
Hotline 1 – 4 School (Levelland)	September 20 – 24
Underground School (Levelland)	October 4 - 8
Underground School (Merkel)	October 18 - 22
Hotline 1 – 4 School (Livingston)	October 25 – 29