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Living Well

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Are You Prepared for Driving in Winter Weather?

My name is Chelsea Richmond and I work for K-State Research and Extension as a Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in the Flint Hills District. Our mission is to provide research-based non-biased information from Kansas State University to the citizens of Chase and Morris counties. Through this column I hope to provide you and your family with information and tips for *Living Well*.

While we have had some beautiful days this winter, are you prepared in case the weather takes a turn for the worse? With today's four-wheel drive vehicles and cell phone technology, travel may seem safe. But you can easily find yourself or your family in a dangerous situation when traveling. For example, during a trip across the state, you may encounter a blinding snowstorm that makes the roads impassible and causes you to pull over and wait out the storm. Therefore, it is important to be prepared and take precautions to keep you and your family safe.

Assembling a kit of some basic items may help you survive hazardous winter travel. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has made recommendations on items to include in a winter travel kit. These include: blanket/sleeping bag (more than one if multiple passengers), small shovel, ice scraper, battery-powered radio, flashlight with extra batteries, water, non-perishable snack food, extra warm clothing, such as insulated coveralls, jacket, hat, gloves, and boots, tow chain or rope, bag of road salt or sand or non-skid mats (for traction, if stuck), fluorescent distress flag (a bright bandanna tied to an antenna will work), jumper cables, cellphone or two-way radio, road maps, emergency flares or reflectors, first aid kit, and a candle, coffee can, and matches stored in a water-proof container (for temporary light and heat).

According to the Department of Commerce, about 70 percent of automobile accidents resulting in death are ice or snow related. Another 25 percent of winter deaths can be attributed to people being caught out in a storm. The National Weather Service reports that many people die each year when they attempt to leave their vehicle during a storm to walk to safety. Instead, stranded drivers should stay with their car, tie a piece of cloth to the car's antenna, and keep the car running while using the heater 10 minutes out of each hour. People should remember to keep their interior lights on while the engine is running, and to avoid hypothermia by constantly moving their arms and legs.

This time of year is often accompanied by uncertain weather and travel conditions. So, the next time you head out on the road, be prepared for winter weather emergencies. For more information on winter weather safety and extreme cold, visit the FEMA website at www.ready.gov/winter or contact the Flint Hills Extension office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136 or the office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491.

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