

# Winter Defence

**Your guide to Home Safety and Storm Preparedness**



# Winter Defence Advice Note

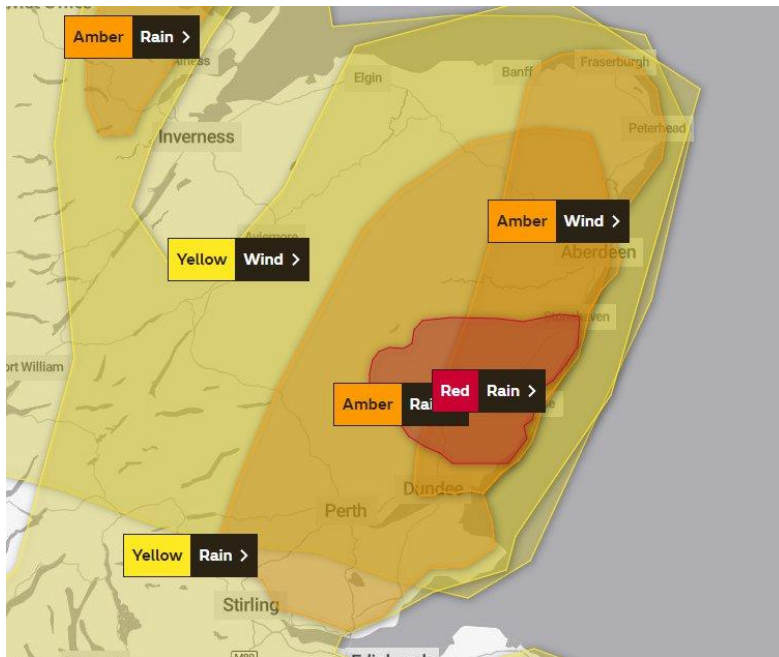
## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this advice note is to raise awareness of how to prepare your home for winter and storm related issues along with tips for household weather resilience. This advice note has been prepared based on a presentation developed by NESCOL. Danny Watson the Curriculum Manager at NESCOL has many years experience as a joiner and builder along with living in rural Perthshire and Aberdeenshire.



## 2 Batten down the hatches!

A sight we are now all too familiar with on the weather forecasts. Are the amount of storms becoming more frequent? Is it that we are seeing more news coverage of extreme weather? Are the effects on infrastructure worsened due to the increasing demands on them? What can we do about it?? Being prepared as best we can is a good start and will allow us to help ourselves and others.



A powercut can last seconds, or several minutes/hours/days and occasionally into weeks. How would you cope with no electricity? No TV, no Radio, No fridge/freezer, possibly no heating or hot water, no charging of mobile comms devices, no running water, no internet, no lights, no alarm systems. Can anyone think of any other daily services that would be impacted by a powercut?

Leaks in your home can appear and never reappear when there is extreme rain and wind conditions. Pipes can burst and leak in frosty conditions. Rivers can leak during heavy rainfall. Guttering and downpipes can block, causing leaks and damp to get into your home. Septic tanks and their overflows can leak if they are overwhelmed by rainfall.

There are various garden and outdoor items that can become projectiles during high wind speeds. I'm sure we have all witnessed some of the following items go missing or end up in others gardens. Often it is only by good fortune that no-one gets hurt, but unfortunately it does happen all too often as well.

Trees and limbs can cause real destruction during storms. They are often the worst offenders in any storm and can take out other services with them. Power and phone cables are prone to damage, as are vehicles, buildings, garden sheds and people. Remember, under a tree is not a great place to seek shelter in a storm. As well as falling limbs/branches, trees are great conductors for lightning.

### 3 Autumn/Pre-winter checks

- **Heating Fuel**, be careful to not let your tank get too low. Dirt and condensation are often present in the bottom parts of the tank level and both of these can cause boiler problems. There will also be more demand for fuel in bad weather so plan ahead as much as possible.
- **Roof**, What can you do safely? Check over roof for defects. Use binoculars and vantage points. Clean gutters if this can be done safely. Find a reliable roofer and deal with problems as quickly as possible. Take preventative measures, roses at top of downpipes, keeping drain off points clear. Cleaning leaves from flat roof drains etc. These small measures can save big repair bills.
- **Garden furniture**, A table, chair, trampoline, wheelie bin or any loose item can become a deadly missile in high wind. Store what you can inside and properly secure down any other items.
- **Draughts**, With the cost of any heating fuel continuing to rise we want to cut as many draughts as possible. There are many cost effective and simple solutions to reducing draughts. I would also ask you to consider the need for ventilation. Condensation and mould problems are on the rise with people want to stop every bit of ventilation in a house. Any areas that produce high moisture levels should still have free airflow to a reasonable amount. While living areas are preferred to be draught free, bear in mind that certain appliances will need fresh air to operate efficiently and safely. There are some excellent online resources to help with draught proofing. Use a candle, feather or strand of thread to help find draughts.
- **Trees**. It may be limited what you can do if you spot a weak tree or limb. Act if the tree is likely to cause damage. Report it to the appropriate service provider if it is likely cause damage to cables etc. Perhaps somebody in the area would take down a suspect tree for firewood

- **Heating System**, Get to know what type of boiler you have and how to resolve minor maintenance issues by yourself. Some day to day problems can be caused by simple to resolves problems. Some examples are thermostat controls being not properly set. The systems pressure dropping too low and the boiler won't fire. Time clock being wrongly set, or in the wrong position. A blown fuse, or a switch that's been put off. Low fuel. Heating or oil pump failure. Some you can fix, others you can describe to a heating engineer to perhaps give them a better idea of what to bring.
- **Radiators**, Cold at top part, need bleeding. Cold at bottom, system usually needs flushed through. Can massively impact the system's efficiency and economy. Automatic bleeders are available.

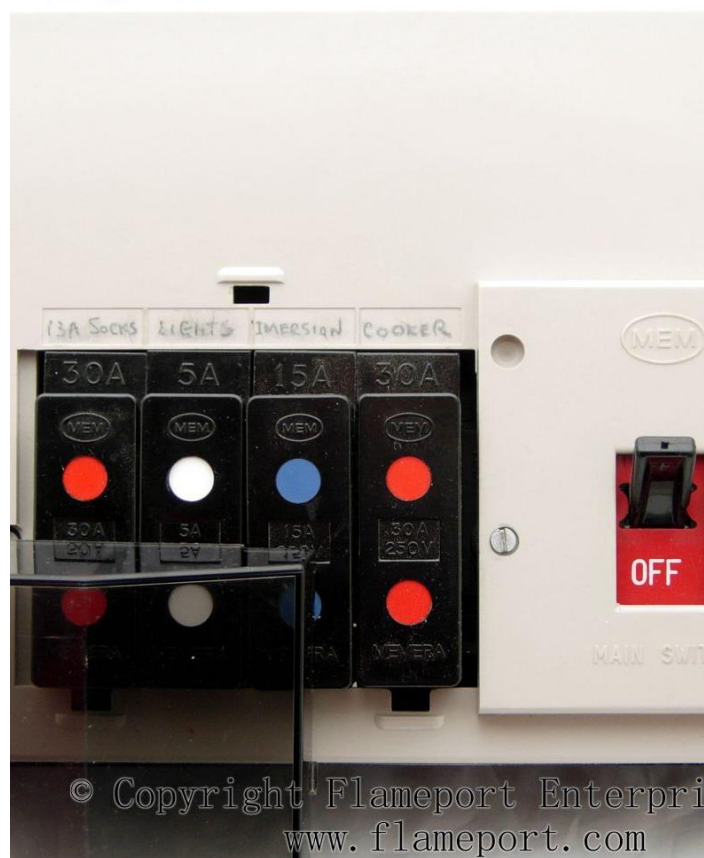
## 4 Winter Readiness

- **Supplies**, Its better to have a stock in and not need it, than needing it and not having anything in the cupboards. I would recommend keeping some tins and other non perishables in a separate storage away from everyday food. Keep a reasonable amount of provision to provide light. Wind up torches are readily available and can be kept in a drawer or cupboard at various points throughout your home. There is nothing worse than having to negotiate a dark house in the early hours to find a torch when you could have had one in your bedside drawer. Consider drinking water if the taps were to stop. A portable water filter can provide clean drinking water various sources.
- **Safety**, Caution must always be used if using alternative heat and light sources. E.g. if you are using a solid fuel heater that is rarely used because of a powercut, make sure it is safe to use, has been serviced or the flue cleaned. Ensure you have a working CO2 detector close by and be mindful of heat/flame transfer. Portable gas appliances can be very useful, again, be sure they are properly serviced and are in good order. If using battery powered torches etc for light, ensure you have a good stock of in date batteries, and dispose of them in the correct manner once they are used. As wind up torches are now so readily available and economical they remain the safest and most reliable form of emergency lighting.
- **Medicine**, I would suggest keeping a little more stock of basic medicines, painkillers, cough and cold remedies etc. Also make sure as much as possible that any prescribed medication doesn't get too low on stocks. Travel could be restricted in extreme weather limiting your opportunity to replenish stocks in your home. It is good practice to have a first aid kit at home, remember to check that any items that have a use by date are still good.
- **Heating**, A new or recently serviced used portable gas heater is certainly a good winter investment. If the power is down and you have no other back up, this could be your primary heat source until things are up and running again. Keep a stock of gas as much as is practical. Your location may dictate how much is a sensible amount to keep. Layer up, core body heat is crucial and if the main heating system in a home is out of action, it will feel extremely cold in any area away from a temporary heat source.

- **Bins**, Get and use a lid strap for your wheelie bin. Saves rubbish all along the drive or street. Secure your bin to something too.
- **Pipes**, Well insulated pipes save money. Heat loss, repair bills to fix bursts, and damage a burst pipe causes.
- **Outdoor taps**, Turn off, drain, and leave slightly open
- **Outbuildings**, Don't forget to protect plumbing in sheds/outbuildings.
- **Flood protection products**, Lots that you can do to help minimise damage from flooding. Don't wait until it happens. If you suspect your property may be in a risk zone start to plan. Some flood facts. Most floods are short lived, caused by a spate. In most cases you are trying to stop, or at least slow down water ingress into your property for a relatively short period of time. Things like a barrier part way up your door openings. Having waterproof covers for your solum vents. Sealing any service entry points to your home. These small measures can often be enough to stop, or considerably slow down flood water getting into your home. Can't stop the water? Move what you can upstairs or onto higher surfaces. All of these things must be done after making yourself safe, which will often leave no time to put preventative measures in place. Often road gullies on town/village streets can cause rapid water ingress. If they are not cleared out the road can quickly flood and breach kerb height, resulting in flowing water on the pavements which can be at floor level, or under floor vent level.

## 5 Emergency Procedures - Electricity

- **Fuse Board**, There are different types. Ensure you know where it is and what type it is. Do you need fuse wire? Do you know how to reset a tripped breaker. What if the power is on but your sockets or lights are off, how would you begin to fix this? We'll look at this soon.



- **Prep**, We have spoken about prep items for a powercut. Keep them in a sensible place, a place that's easy to find in the dark. Fill containers with tap water, you don't know how long the tap will run for. Where is the camping gas stove? Have things in an accessible place.
- **Contact Numbers**, It is worth having numbers of tradesmen should the need arise. However, many other people will likely be needing their services too. Good numbers to have are neighbours, community groups, the local Council, Electricity and Gas company numbers, or website address if internet is available.
- **Generator**, A generator is an extremely useful piece of equipment, but it does come with some risk. I would only ever recommend using a generator to power a single item, such as a fridge freezer, or to charge batteries, power an internet router. If anything involves opening up wiring to connect the generator to, don't do it. Only use a generator for other uses if the installation has been carried by a qualified electrician.

- **Check fuse board tripping out, If you have no power to sockets only, or lights only then you more than likely have a faulty appliance. Unplug all items, or switch off all light switches. Plug items back in one at a time and turn them on. Or switch on a light at a time until you find the one that is tripping the board.**
- **Water, Some mains water will stop in the event of a power cut. If a mains water system relies on a pump and the power is down, no water is pumped into the system. Properties will have water for as long there is some left in the pipework. Top of the hill will run out first. This could be the same for fuel pumps, waste water systems and water treatment plants.**

## **6 Emergency Procedures - Water**

- **Stopcock, Ensure you know where your water shut off is located. This will likely be under the kitchen sink, but in reality it could be anywhere, especially in an older house. Look for access panels in the bathroom or in a hall. It may be in another kitchen cupboard as often older houses have been reconfigured. Check for small access covers in the back of units. Once found, test the valve for function. A shut off valve may not have been used for some time, possibly years. If it is stuck solid it may need a professional to get it working. Don't force it shut as this could snap the tap.**
- **Outside toby, If there is no inside shut off, there should be an outside water toby, underground. This will require a long key to switch off. These can be prone to sticking too, do not force a sticky toby. The depth they are down, usually 3'+ makes repair time consuming and expensive.**
- **Bust pipe, If a pipe bursts in your home you will normally be aware of it quite quickly. Shut down your shut off valve immediately. If it keeps flowing go to your hot water cylinder, if you have one, and close valves there too. Sometimes water will continue to flow from storage tanks. Check your kitchen cold tap, if that has stopped the rest will too.**
- **Away for long time, It is good practice to shut off your water if you are away on holiday at any time of year. Although very uncommon, pipes can rupture, joints and fittings can fail at any time of year, and a main tap running for a week or two will cause catastrophic damage to your property.**
- **Damage, Imagine emptying a full size swimming pool into your home. That is similar to having a mains pressure leak for any length of time.**



- **Repairs, You don't have to be a plumber to carry out a quick temporary repair to a water pipe. There are many push fit fittings and short sections of flexible pipe available these days. With some simple tools and materials you will be able to repair a small broken section of pipe and have your system going again.**

## **7 Vehicle Checks**

- **Importance: Essential for winter prep.**
- **Winter Tyres: Consider fitting them.**
- **Antifreeze: Check level and efficiency.**
- **Fluids: Replenish as needed.**
- **Windscreen: Carry bottled water for cleaning.**
- **Battery: Test performance.**
- **Start Vehicle: Run the engine frequently.**
- **Emergency Kit: Warm jacket, small shovel, phone charger, salt/grit, torch, and food rations.**

A good garage will deal most things on the list above.

A winter car bag is a great way to put all emergency needs in one place. This could be kept in the boot, or behind a seat. Often modern cars don't have a spare wheel, so there may be free space in the area where it would be housed.

## 8 Prolonged cold

- **Icicles**, They can gain length quickly, are heavy and sharp. Not good to have hanging above your doorway.



- **Snow Cover**, snow can provide a blanket that helps insulate a house. Good practice to clear snow from large flat roofs if safe to do. Gutters can back up if snow freezes, or melts then freezes over.
- **Paths**, A clear path is a safe path.
- **Equipment**, A good strong snow shovel is essential.

- **Road grit, Keep in mind that road salt is most effective down to -7c.**
- **Ice, Beware of frozen water, ponds, burns, lochs etc. Animals and children are at more risk.**
- **Heating systems, Prolonged, deep cold makes any machinery work harder and can make some parts prone to breakages due to them becoming brittle. Outside boilers usually have a frost setting that allows them to circulate hot water around the boiler. Best to keep your boiler on a lower heat for longer than sudden sharp blasts of heat from cold.**
- **Enjoy your surroundings, Try and enjoy the winter season while being as prepared as you can be.**

## **9 Pets**

- **Remember your furry friends' needs.**
- **Ensure outdoor kennels or hutches are warm.**
- **Trim long hair around dogs' undercarriage and paws to prevent discomfort.**
- **Increase food for pets playing in snow or ice; food provides energy and warmth.**
- **Be cautious with anti-freeze as it is deadly if ingested by pets.**
- **Useful tips for driving in snow**

## **10 Contacts**

- **Electricity Company: Check power outage updates online at [Powertrack](#).**
- **Water Board: Visit [Scottish Water](#).**
- **Buildings insurance company**
- **Local plumber**
- **Local electrician**
- **Local roofing company**
- **Local council: [Aberdeenshire Council](#)**
- **Local general contractor**

## 11 Resources

- Aberdeenshire Council have a great selection of physical and informative resources to help householders prepare and cope with emergency situations.
- [Ready Aberdeenshire - Aberdeenshire Council](#)
- [Flood protection products - Aberdeenshire Council](#)
- **Scottish Flood Forum**
- [Preparing For Flooding - How The Scottish Flood Forum Can Help](#)
- The internet has various sources of information to help you prepare yourself and your property for winter.
- [Traditional Building Flood Damage](#) Great information for dealing with flood damage to a traditional building.
- [Traditional Building Damp Problems](#) Good advice on damp problems common with old buildings.
- [Traditional Building Maintenance](#) Provides a wealth of information on maintain a traditional property.
- [Aberdeenshire Resilience](#) This site contains a good spread of information produced by Aberdeenshire Council.
- [Energy Saving Trust](#) This site is great to find information on potential energy saving systems.
- [Secondary Glazing Kit | Magnetic DIY Double Glazing | Cut My](#)

## 12 Conclusion

- Winter in Aberdeenshire is a lovely season with much to enjoy.
- Be sensible in your own actions and considerate to others.
- Prepare as much as your circumstances and resources allow