



# Winter Hazards

## Hydrants, Icicles, Space Heaters, and Drifting Snow and Build Up

### Hydrants

**Adopt your neighborhood hydrant.**  
**Adopt the hydrant in your business district.**

It is important that you, your neighbors, and your business community take care of your fire hydrant. Fire hydrants are an important tool for the firefighters to use to fight a structure fire. Searching and digging out a hydrant wastes valuable time that could be used to rescue victims and put out the fire. It's not only the responsibility of people who have a hydrant in their yard or in front of their business, it takes everyone's efforts to keep the firefighter's water source accessible.

Take responsibility for your hydrant all year round. During the winter months the falling snow and the snowplows can bury fire hydrants. When you shovel out your driveway, sidewalk, or mailbox take an extra minute to shovel out your fire hydrant. A 3-foot clear space should be maintained around the circumference of a fire hydrant. This is the amount of space the firefighters need to operate a fire hydrant while fighting a structure fire.

In spring, summer, and fall fire hydrants must be free of obstructions. This includes shrubs, plants, garbage cans, debris, birdbaths, and any decorative yard ornaments.

It is important to know that if your neighbor's house is on fire, the firefighters may need time and water to also protect your home. If you share a wall in a building or are near another business that has a fire, the firefighters will need all the water and time they can get to protect your businesses from heat, flames, smoke, and toxic gases.

### **Minnesota State Fire Code** Section 507

Statute 507.5.4 **Obstruction.** Post, fences, vehicles, growth, trash, storage and other materials or objects shall not be placed, or objects shall not be placed or kept near fire hydrants, fire departments inlet connections or fire protection system control valves in a manner that would prevent such equipment or fire hydrants from being immediately

discernible. The fire department shall not be deterred or hindered from gaining immediate access to fire protection equipment or fire hydrants.

Statute 507.5.5 **Clear space around hydrants.** A 3-foot (914mm) clear space shall be maintained around the circumference of a fire hydrant except as otherwise required or approved.

### **Icicles and Ice**

Be aware of the dangers associated with icicles. Icicles are heavy and sharp and can cause minor or fatal injuries, building damage, and fires. Icicles should be removed from areas around your home or business if they are hanging over entrances and exits, gas meters, utility boxes, areas where people gather, over sidewalks, or anywhere they can cause damage or harm.

Ice buildup on gas meters is extremely dangerous. A blocked vent can allow excess gas pressure into the house. When ice and snow melt during the day and refreeze at night the regulator vent can get blocked.

Like hydrants it is very important to keep your gas meter assembly clear of snow. Accumulated snow can prevent the meter from operating properly by stopping the flow of natural gas.

It is also important to protect your gas meter from melting snow dripping from above or causing water to pool around the meter. When the water turns into ice it can be dangerous. If you notice ice on your meter or are concerned that the meter's regulator vent may be blocked, please call Xcel Energy at 1-800-895-2999 or Centerpoint Energy at 612-342-5123

If you live in Hennepin County, Centerpoint Energy may be able to provide your home or commercial property with a free Ice Shield installed above your gas meter. Call 612-342-5123 and follow the options for more information.

Prevent ice dams from forming or have ice dams professionally removed from your roof. When ice and snow melts on your roof, water gets trapped behind the ice dam and causes damage to your roof. Water can leak through the damaged roof and cause electrical fires as it finds its way in to outlets, light switches, electrical panels, light fixtures, smoke alarms, and other electrical appliances.

When removing icicles, be careful, use a long pole and do not stand directly under them as you break them off. Push the icicles away from you and use eye protection. Use caution when you break them off to make sure you do not damage your roof, gutters, or eaves. Make sure children and pets are not near when you are removing icicles. Icicles

can shatter like glass on impact and flying ice can cause eye injuries, cuts, dents to vehicles, and break windows.

To avoid injuries or damage to your home, the Excelsior Fire District recommends you contact a trusted roofing company to remove ice dams and icicles from your roof.

### **Space Heaters**

#### **“Give Space Heaters Space”**

Each year space heaters cause hundreds of home and business fires resulting in fire deaths, injuries, and millions of dollars in damage. As with all heating equipment it is important to know how to use a space heater safely and to prevent a space heater from causing a fire in your home or business. Home heating is the second leading cause of house fires behind cooking.

It is extremely important that you read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for your space heater.

Space heaters must be stamped with the mark of an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories. Any heater that is too old to have an independent testing laboratory mark is too old to operate safely.

Space heaters should be plugged into directly to an outlet and not an extension cord, surge protector, or multi-plug adapter.

Apartment and Business owners and operators should consider making a policy for space heater use. The policy can prohibit their use, required they are plugged in directly to an outlet and unplugged when not they are not in use.

In business space heaters should be unplugged every night before the staff leaves. In homes space heaters should only be plugged in when a room is occupied by a person who is awake.

A space heater should be in good condition. The cords can not be frayed, pinched, or damaged. Space heater cords should not be run under rugs or any other materials.

All the knobs should be in place and secure, the front grate/cage should be secured and there should not be any damage to the unit.

No tape, wire, or rope should be used to repair the space heater, hang it, prop it, or keep it in place.

Allow the space heater venting space so it does not over heat or ignite items around it on fire. Venting or distance information should be in the manufacturer's instructions.

Business owners should be aware that there are fire codes in the Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) that apply to the use of space heaters in commercial buildings. This includes office spaces, retail stores, restaurants, general business, and any building listed in the MSFC. The codes are listed below.

### **Minnesota State Fire Code**

#### Section 605

**605.10 Portable, electric space heaters.** Portable, electric space heaters shall comply with Sections 605.10.1 through 605.10.4.

**605.10.1 Listed and labeled.** Only listed and labeled portable, electric space heaters shall be used.

**605.10.2 Power supply.** Portable, electric space heaters shall be plugged directly into an approved receptacle.

**605.10.3 Extension cords.** Portable, electric space heaters shall not be plugged into extension cords.

### **Drifting Snow and Snow Build Up**

Make sure the doors and egress windows of your home are not blocked by snow or frozen shut. These could be your only way out if a fire should occur in your home. If you have loved ones, friends, or neighbors who have limited mobility make sure the doors and lower level windows of their home are not blocked.

Business and apartment owners and operators must make sure all the emergency exits from the buildings are cleared of snow and ice in a reasonable amount of time after a snow fall, blizzard, or ice storm.

Check the vents that come out the side and roof of your home. Dryer vents can be located anywhere on the exterior of your home. Apartment and business dryer vents can be blocked very easily depending on their location. A blocked dryer vent can cause heat to build up in your dryer and start a fire.

The sidewall vents for your hot water heater and heating units can get blocked by accumulating or drifting snow or ice buildup. When these vents are blocked carbon monoxide can build up in your home causing illness or death.

Check out the openings or vents on your roof. Any opening or vent that has been installed on your roof has a purpose and are designed to be open. Plumbing vent pipes that get packed with snow can trap sewer gases in your home. Beside from having an unpleasant smell sewer gases are toxic and can cause health issues and even a fire.

Chimneys located on the roof or the side of your home or business for gas, wood, and heating fire places can get packed with snow or clogged with ice. Never start a fire in any type of fireplace with the notion the heat will melt away the blockage. The toxic gases including carbon monoxide will not pass through the snow or ice.

### **Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms**

Even the most attentive snow shoveler or proactive home and business owner cannot watch drifting snow and ice buildup 24 hours a day. Have working smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms installed in your home or business will warn the occupants of danger.

Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of your home, inside and outside bedrooms, and in areas where people sleep.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms should be installed within 10 feet of where people sleep.

For more information contact the Excelsior Fire District at 952-960-1692 or [kmurphyringate@excelsiorfire.org](mailto:kmurphyringate@excelsiorfire.org)