

# Fire Commissioners Column.....

**Bill Madison**

Several weeks ago we discussed preparing the heating systems in our homes for the cold weather that has now arrived. I thought perhaps it might be a good idea to also review some precautions associated with winter precipitation, i.e. ice and snow.

Snow and especially snow plowing often cause problems for emergency responders. Obviously responses will be delayed by icy road conditions but sometimes finding and gaining access to the address of the emergency can be a problem too. If we can't see the numbers of your address it will take longer to find you. Be sure your address numbers are cleared, marked and visible. Use reflective numbers for easier identification at night. If your driveway or access road is not cleared or is plowed over, it will take longer to access your house. If we can't get the fire engine or ambulance close to the house, it may affect the outcome of the incident. If you have a fire hydrant on or near your property, clear snow around it and shovel a path from the road to the hydrant. Every minute counts when we need a charged hose to effect a rescue or stop the advance of a fire.

Winter driving is a challenge at times so it's best to be as prepared as possible. A good ice scraper and brush for clearing snow off the windows is a must in each vehicle. Clearing frost from the driver's front window only isn't enough. You need 100% visibility so clean the side and back windows too. If you leave a mound of snow on the roof, it may fly off as you move and block the windshield of the car following you and cause an accident. It's also a good idea to have a flashlight, blanket and even a small shovel in your car or truck especially if you travel in rural areas.

The best advice I can offer for driving on slick roads is to be patient. Everything (starting, stopping, turning etc.) takes longer. Give yourself plenty of spacing between other vehicles and go slow. If you start to skid, steer in the direction you want the front end of the car to go and take your foot off the accelerator. You may want to engage the clutch or put the car in neutral but it's not a good idea to brake. It's hard to control the vehicle if the wheels are locked.

Pay attention to the weather advisories and warnings issued by the National Weather Service. Generally they refer to elevations above 3000 feet as "the mountains". Usually winter weather advisories are issued when snow, sleet or freezing rain is expected. These advisories are upgraded to warnings when snowfall of 4 or more inches is expected in the valleys or 8 inches in the mountains. If they forecast all snow, they send out a snow advisory instead of the winter weather advisory. If they expect more than 4 inches of snow, (8 inches in the mountains) they will issue a heavy snow warning. Be sure to check the conditions of the mountain passes if you're traveling there. Weather conditions in the passes change quickly.