

Don't be left in the cold - Get ready for winter

Submitted by: Surrey House

Thursday, 27 October 2011

- Initiative follows problems caused by freezing temperatures (<http://www.direct.gov.uk/getreadyforwinter>) last winter (<http://www.water.org.uk>)
- Record property insurance claims
- Government departments, Local Resilience Forums, Water UK and voluntary sector back campaign

With memories still fresh of the problems caused by the freezing winter of 2010/11 which affected many people and communities, government departments, industry bodies and the voluntary sector have joined forces to urge everyone to Get Ready for Winter.

Launching the campaign today Anne McIntosh MP, Co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Water Group and Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, said the disruption caused by the extreme weather last winter highlighted the need for a co-ordinated campaign to foster greater resilience by encouraging home owners, businesses and other organisations to protect their health, homes and the vulnerable by following some simple and practical advice.

"The freezing temperatures caused severe hardship to many people and communities," said Miss McIntosh. "In some ways we were not prepared – both individually and collectively – for the severity of the weather. The government and other agencies have taken action to ensure our infrastructure, particularly transport, is better prepared this winter.

"We must become more resilient to these extremes of climate which, with climate change, appear to be becoming more frequent."

Travel arrangements, vehicle checks, home protection, heating, the health and wellbeing of relatives and the elderly, are all areas covered by the Get Ready for Winter campaign.

Referring to the fact that the onset of winter will be heralded by the clocks going back on Sunday, Miss McIntosh said people might like to "use the extra hour to Get Ready for Winter". She announced that as part of the initiative a Get Ready for Winter page had been set up on the DirectGov website to offer simple tips and advice. It links to other web sites providing more information.

"It's worth checking it out," said Miss McIntosh. "For example, should you have a flu jab? Is your home vulnerable in some way?"

Jean Spencer, Regulation Director for Anglian Water, said the freezing temperatures last winter caused a record increase in burst pipes across the UK – both in water company networks and homes.

"The biggest increase in bursts was in properties," Mrs Spencer said. "Thousands of homes were flooded by burst pipes. It ruined the Christmas/New Year period for many people."

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has revealed that during December its members dealt with £900 million in property damage claims. This was the highest pay out yet made for damage caused by a bout of

freezing weather and heavy snow in the UK. December was the coldest since records began in 1910.*

Of the property claims, 103,000 were for burst pipe damage, totalling £680 million.

“So beware of the hidden danger in your loft,” said Mrs Spencer. “A collapsed ceiling or coming home to water running down the stairs is a nightmare and can be a costly winter experience.”

Mrs Spencer said while UK water companies have taken particular care to make sure they are fully prepared for the possibility of another severe winter, “we are keen to ensure our customers are made aware of the dangers now and know how to take preventative action. We also want to make sure they get the right sort of help when they face a problem. This is why we have created a special Get Ready for Winter page on our websites offering advice. We hope our customers will check it out and the DirectGov site.”

Miss McIntosh said she was “delighted and much encouraged” that so many government departments were actively promoting the Get Ready for Winter campaign – others will join in as we enter winter – together with Water UK, the Local Resilience Forums and, from the voluntary sector, the British Red Cross, WRVS, St John Ambulance and Salvation Army. They are being joined by a host of other organisations from regulators to companies.*

Simon Lewis, Head of UK Emergency Planning and Response for the Red Cross, said emergency response teams battled through the snow to provide life-saving treatment to critically ill patients, responded to emergency 999 calls, delivered much needed medicine and medical equipment, and transported patients and vital NHS personnel.

“Although we can never fully protect ourselves against extremes of weather, being prepared makes a vital difference, minimising the disruption caused to families and communities and even saving lives,” said Mr Lewis.

“That is why we are backing the ‘Get Ready for Winter’ initiative and urging everyone to take steps that will help to prepare them for the disruption caused by snow or plummeting temperatures.”

Volunteers also became ‘snow (<http://www.water.org.uk/home/news/blog>) friends’, visiting the homes of vulnerable people to ensure they were ok and to offer extra help during the bad weather (<http://www.water.org.uk/home/news/blog>).

“This imaginative yet simple initiative will only succeed if people respond to the messages,” said Miss McIntosh. “All the information in the world won’t help if it’s just floating around in the ether; so we are getting the messages out in as many ways as we can – from the grass roots involvement of volunteers to press conferences like this one.”

The threat posed by unprotected water pipes was graphically illustrated at the Press Conference by eco-engineer and television personality Dick Strawbridge who froze a pipe so it burst and then thawed it out to demonstrate how they can flood a home, business or other property. Film of the demonstration will be uploaded onto Water UK and water company websites.

For more information contact:

Water UK (<http://www.water.org.uk>): Stuart Hyslop, John Burbedge or Liz Thorne on 01372 460111. Out of hours: 07973 907 979

www.water.org.uk

www.direct.gov.uk/getreadyforwinter

Notes to Editors:

*The Get Ready for Winter campaign is being sponsored by the Cabinet Office and Water UK . It is supported by:

Government departments – Defra, Environment Agency, Department of Health, Health Protection Agency, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Transport, Highways Agency, Met Office and Department for Communities and Local Government.

Local public bodies including – Local Resilience Forums. health professionals and community groups

Voluntary sector – British Red Cross, WRVS, St John Ambulance and Salvation Army

Commercial and independent sector – CBI, IOD, Association of Insurance and Risk Managers (AIRMIC), RAC, AA, chambers of commerce etc

Regulators – Ofwat, CC Water

The peak activity for Get Ready for Winter will happen during the week of 24-30 October but there will be other campaigns during November, including ones from Department of Health and Department for Transport, which will make reference to GRFW.

*Freezing Facts

The initiative follows concerns that last winter was the third cold winter in a row (albeit much colder – temperatures reached -21C) and there are predictions that the trend may continue. Britain's road, rail and airport services have spent tens of millions to ensure they are better prepared for freezing temperatures this winter.

ABI figures show that during the December 2010 period:

- Insurers dealt with 467,000 claims for damage to homes, businesses and vehicles.
- 190,000 claims were for damage to homes and businesses, at a cost of some £900 million (75% domestic; 25% commercial). In Scotland, which was particularly hit, there were 31,000 property damage claims costing some £90 million.
- Of the property claims, 103,000 were for burst pipe damage. The cost of these claims, at £680 million, (average claim costs from £6,500 to £7,200) was up 35% on the amount paid out for burst pipes during the whole of last winter. The large number of burst pipes in Northern Ireland resulted in 6,400 claims worth £40 million.
- There were 278,000 claims from insured motorists for vehicle damage costing £530 million. Many of these claims were for low speed collisions, as motorists struggled on icy roads