

Snowpocalypse

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Narrator] In January 2014, the nation was hit by the Polar Vortex, leaving cities and roadways covered in snow and ice. Dubbed the “Snowpocalypse” by many, the Southeast was hit hard and many were unprepared. The majority of CDC staff in Atlanta, Georgia was either snowed in or faced the dangerous commute back to their homes. Those who chose to drive were gridlocked on Atlanta highways due to the icy roads and spent hours trapped in their cars.

CDC asked its staff about their experiences during the Snowpocalypse and if they were prepared.

Were you prepared for the ice and snow that day?

[Woman 1] I was prepared to leave early and I had a full tank of gas in my car, but that was about it.

[Man 1] I developed a kit over the last—I don’t know—it took me three or four months to get it all together. But I had a full kit at home, and so, yeah, it was no problem.

[Woman 2] I guess we were prepared in personal terms. We were not prepared to handle at work and we were not really prepared on how to help people that were here get out of the situation.

[Narrator] Did you have any preparedness items in your car?

[Woman 3] No. I had a few jackets just from, you know, wearing a jacket and then leaving it in the car, but I didn’t have any water or food or anything. And I didn’t use the bathroom before I left, which was a horrible idea!

[Woman 4] No. Luckily, I went to get something to eat before I got on the interstate. So, I was very lucky to have food and something to drink in my car.

[Man 1] I did not have a kit in my car. I had a few random items, but not an actual kit.

[Narrator] Tell us about your commute home.

[Woman 1] My commute was about six and a half hours. Typically, it’s 45 minutes. My carpool partner and I actually took a different route hoping that we’d get home faster, but instead we got stuck even more.

[Woman 3] Well it took maybe four or five hours to get outside of the perimeter and then, once I hit Six Flags, it was a dead stop. There was no way I was getting anywhere. By the time I made it home, I had spent 19 hours in the car.

[Woman 4] I was in the car for 12 hours. I saw a lot of other people do interesting things on the interstate, like leave their cars in the middle of the road. It was very interesting to see how people would just leave their cars everywhere and get out and just start walking.

[Woman 2] We had a class here with about 26 students coming from 16 different states all over the nation to be trained on public health requirements for testing. Tuesday morning, we realized

we need to get people out, so we were able to get the shuttle here to take them back to the hotel and then we covered the rest by teleconferences.

[Narrator] What would you have done differently?

[Woman 1] I would definitely have packed maybe some snacks in my car and some water, a blanket perhaps.

[Man 1] I might have walked. Like, I've walked home from CDC before in a previous snow storm. It would've taken me less time to walk, I think, than to drive.

[Narrator] Have you changed your travel or car preparedness since then?

[Woman 3] Yes, I now have a phone charger for my car. And I also carry water and snack food in my car. I'm definitely better prepared now than I was before.

[Man 1] I did put together an actual kit and put it in my car. One of the items I have in my preparedness kit is a hard copy, laminated map of Atlanta and I keep that in my car with my kit in case I need, you know, my GPS isn't working or I don't want to burn down my phone battery when I need to find an alternate route.

[Woman 5] In my trunk, I keep a case of water, I keep paper towels, I have a flashlight, I have a lighter, I have a blanket, I have two coats, and then I have like some medical supplies as well, first aid kit and stuff like that.

[Woman 2] I think that we would have had the students exit two hours previous. The way that that's going to change our plan in the future is being more proactive. For the course, I would have prepared the students to leave two hours or so earlier to make sure everyone was able to get home. And, in the future, we'll be more proactive in that direction.

[Narrator] Preparing your car for emergencies, like winter weather, is important and can help you in a tricky situation. You can avoid many dangerous winter travel problems by planning ahead. Have maintenance service on your vehicle as often as the manufacturer recommends.

Also, keep the following emergency items in your vehicle:

- A battery-powered radio and extra batteries
- A flashlight
- Water
- Snack food
- Blankets
- Tire chains
- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- A first aid kit
- A tool kit
- And Road maps

Remember, being prepared for an emergency starts with *you*.

Thanks for joining me today. For this list and more disaster tips, follow @CDCEmergency on Twitter or visit emergency.cdc.gov.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.