



# City of Houston Media Release Office of Mayor Annise Parker

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 7, 2010**

## **City of Houston activates cold weather plan**

At Mayor Parker's direction, the City of Houston Emergency Operations Center is now activated to coordinate the city's health and safety response to the extreme cold. "Because there appears to be little chance of precipitation that could cause dangerous road conditions, the focus is on people, pets and pipes," said Mayor Parker. "Our main concern is the well-being of our large homeless population and the elderly and other vulnerable citizens who may not have heat in their homes. We also need to make sure our pets are safe from the cold."

The number to call if in need of shelter is 2-1-1. The city's homeless shelters are open on a 24/7 basis and will not turn anyone away. "Outreach teams from the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston and Harris County will be out tonight encouraging the homeless to take shelter. Those who refuse to come in from the cold will be provided blankets," said the coalition's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Nancy Lyons.

METRO is also taking extra steps to keep riders warm. Starting at 4:30 p.m. tomorrow METRO will have space heaters at 28 Park and Ride lots and 18 Transit Centers. Effective tonight, METROLift vehicles will be stationed at Transit centers to serve as temporary refuge from the cold. These are not intended as a substitute for homeless shelter, but rather as a last-resort refuge during the overnight hours. METRO is also on standby to provide emergency transport to shelters at the request of city officials.

"We have a responsibility to take care of each other," Mayor Parker said. "I ask everyone to reach out and make sure neighbors, especially the elderly, have heat and a contact line in case of an emergency."

### **Heater safety**

The fire department urges citizens to be careful and follow some simple safety tips when using space heaters and other supplemental heating sources.

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm.
- Never leave children unattended in a room with a space heater - Children knock over space heaters especially if they are placed on top of wobbly tables or stools and near where the children play. Children may also stick paper or toys in the grates of the space heaters especially gas space heaters. The city had two reported fires in 2004 caused by children playing with space heaters.
- Keep all combustible materials, including yourself, at least 3 feet from the heater

- Open face heaters should have a screen
- Provide ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

### **Protect your pipes**

Prolonged temperatures below 32 degrees may result in ice forming inside your pipes. To prevent freeze damage wrap pipes in insulation made specifically for that purpose. If unable to obtain insulation, towels, blankets or folded sheets can be used. If your water lines are exposed, you may wish to turn off water to the house and drain the lines overnight. Electric water heaters should be turned off to prevent damage. Sprinkler backflow prevention devices are above ground and also highly susceptible to freezing. The city does not allow billing adjustments when faucets are left dripping to avoid freezing.

If your house is going to be vacant and unheated all winter, it is recommended that you shut off the water at the private valve, drain the hot water tank and all pipes. If your pipes do burst, turn the water off quickly to avoid a high bill or property damage.

### **Road safety**

Even though icy roads are not expected, the Department of Public Works and Engineering is on standby just in case. Fifteen dump trucks fitted with sand spreaders, capable of spreading "chat rock" on streets, are available. To report ice on roads or bridges, call the City's 3-1-1 Service Helpline (dial 713-837-0311). PWE staffers will monitor the weather and the roadway conditions continuously as well as coordinate efforts with Police, Fire, and EMS to determine which parts of the city need attention.

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