



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Safety First This Winter

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE December 6, 2019

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From Thanksgiving to Christmas, for most people, the holiday season is jam packed. Whether it is decorating, traveling, shopping for gifts or getting together with family and friends, there is a lot going on this time of year. In our region, the snow and cold do not help matters—and in the hustle and bustle of the season, it can be easy to forget the simple things that ensure our holidays are not just enjoyable, but also safe.

Two of the most important things we can do each year, are to ensure our homes and our vehicles are fully equipped for whatever Mother Nature brings. This year, I have again

compiled some tips that I hope will help you and yours stay safe this winter.

**Prepare your home:**

***Stock up on essentials:*** Ensure your home has a good supply of non-perishable food and water. It is also critical to have enough fuel to last you at least three days, as well as batteries readily available;

***Keep heating equipment well-maintained:*** If your home has a chimney, it is critical that it is properly cleaned and all heating elements, such as wood stoves or fireplaces are in perfect working condition. It is suggested you have professional maintenance done on your furnace as well.

***Take extra safety steps when using space heaters:*** If you use space heaters, make sure they are properly cleaned, away from anything that could be heat sensitive and always remember to turn them off when you leave a room.

***Heating help for those in need:*** If you are struggling with home heating bills, the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) can help. Visit [www.myBenefits.ny.gov](http://www.myBenefits.ny.gov) or obtain an application or call your local Department of Social Services office:

- St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services: (315) 379-2297
- Jefferson County Department of Social Services: (315) 785-3229
- Oswego County Department of Social Services: (315) 963-5031

**Prepare your vehicle:**

***Keep your tires filled:*** Low tire pressure affects your ability to steer and brake. This is especially concerning in the winter, as tires lose pressure in the cold. Always check your tires to make sure they are properly inflated and they have ample tread. A good way to do so is through what is known as the “penny test.” Put an upside down penny in the tread of your tire, and if you can see all of President Lincoln’s head, you need new tires.

***Check your vehicle’s fluids:*** Be sure to check all of your vehicle’s fluids—and pay special attention to your windshield wiper fluid. At the same time, do not forget to inspect your wipers, check your battery charge and examine belts and hoses for any cracks or holes.

***Pack an emergency kit:*** In addition to knowing where your vehicle’s owner manual is, you are also urged to pack an emergency kit that remains in your vehicle at all times and contains items such as a shovel, ice scraper, blanket, cell phone charger, flashlight, water, snacks and other necessities.

***Avoid rushing:*** Anytime you travel and there is ice and snow, it goes without saying that you need to give yourself extra time to get to your destination. In addition, of course, do not forget that phone calls and text messages need to wait until your vehicle is in park.

Our winters can be very fun, but they can also be long and dangerous. I hope you will take time to follow these tips to stay safe as the snow, ice and cold continue.