

How to stay safe driving in winter storm

AAA Kansas

Imagine trying to drive through a snow globe that’s just been shaken. That’s what it can feel like when you’re driving in a winter storm or blizzard. Blizzards are the most intense winter storms, and surprisingly, they can happen even when no snow is falling. To be classified as a blizzard, a storm must have either snow falling or blowing around, sustained winds stronger than 35 miles per hour, and visibility of less than a quarter mile for at least three hours. Hazardous storms and inclement weather are a factor in an average of nearly half a million crashes and more

than 2,200 traffic crash deaths nationwide every winter, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. AAA is encouraging drivers to have safety in mind if they must venture out on the wintry roadways. On average, about one-third (32%) of crashes during the winter occur in adverse weather or road surface conditions, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. When you’re driving in a winter storm, conditions can turn life-threatening fast. Strong winds combined with bitterly cold air can create dangerously low wind chills, often well below freezing. When exposed to that kind of cold, you run a real risk of hypothermia

or frostbite, which can set in within minutes. “The most effective travel precaution you can take during an intense winter storm: Stay off the roads entirely,” said Shawn Steward, public affairs manager for AAA Kansas. “Of course, that’s not always possible in an emergency or for critical workers. So being well prepared and knowing how to manage the situation if you are caught or stranded in heavy snow or blizzard conditions can help limit the dangers.” If you must drive in snowy or blizzard conditions, here’s how to prepare:

- Know the forecast.
- Check road conditions.
- Communicate your plans.

- Have a plan for who you’ll call.
- Pack a winter emergency kit.
- Clear windows.

What to do if you get caught driving in a blizzard:

- Pull over when it’s unsafe to continue.
- Use hazard lights to signal other drivers and emergency services.
- Practice patience and drive slowly.

What to do if you get stranded while driving:

- Shelter in place.
- Insulate your body.
- Use your car heater cautiously.
- Make yourself noticeable.

Commissioners

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Stieben asked the superintendents to let teachers know that commissioners will host class visits at the courthouse.

“We will host individual students,” he said. “We’ll do whatever we can to open this process up so that the students can actually come and meet their sheriff. They can come and they can meet their county attorney. They can know their county clerk.”

Kobza suggested commissioners may have powerful stories they can share with students. Stieben asked the superintendents for ideas for formalizing what was discussed Wednesday. Vignery said the superintendents meet on a monthly

basis and can brainstorm ideas. Vignery said he will also speak with the principals in his district.

In other business

The Leavenworth County Commission:

- Tabled further consideration of a resolution for a

county transient guest tax until the commission’s next meeting. Two of the five commissioners were absent Wednesday. If approved, the transient guest tax would be charged to people who stay in hotels or short-term rental units.

Storm

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awareness for that but also raise funds to support help organizations.” The shelter is supported through community donations and various grants, including federal grants. The tenuous nature of federal funding, however, has increased the need for alternative support.

“Monetary donations are always a huge help,” Christensen said. “Especially with government funds being kind of questionable at the moment.”

Christensen said the shelter does have a running list of needs that the community can access.

“For other big things, we always have an Amazon wish list,” Christensen said. “We’re in big need of trash bags right now, cleaning supplies, paper products like toilet paper, paper towels, and winter needs like Kleenexes, cough drops, that sort of thing.”

Since the shelter provides meals three times a day, five days a week, there are also food donations welcome.

“We’re in need of breakfast items like milk, eggs, cereal bars, things that can be cooked for breakfast,” Christensen said. “We need stuff to serve for breakfast here.”

The shelter serves over 200 unhoused individuals in Leavenworth County. However, it also serves food to the community at large.

“For the community meals that we serve out the door, anyone can show up, no questions asked. We don’t require them to be homeless or anything. So, anyone suffering with food insecurity that wants to come get a free meal can absolutely show up at the door Monday through Friday and get a free lunch,” Christensen said.

The outreach provides a critical basic need for its most vulnerable population.

“Counting everybody



Shelter volunteer Tammy Goeser cleans up in the kitchen recently at the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope. Volunteers are a critical part of the success of the shelter.

that we’ve served inside and those suffering from food insecurity that come to the building, we served over 22,000 meals last year,” said shelter coordinator Sherry Sullivan.

The Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope concept as a full-service homeless shelter came into being as the result of a 2010 needs assessment by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. The council put together a task force that spent about a year and a half talking to different churches in the community to see what they were doing and what how to get involved with them and other various agencies to help people living in poverty. Sister Vickie Perkins of SCL talked about the history of how the shelter came into being.

“There’s no public transportation up here and so part of what was needed was a way to get people to doctor appointments and food banks and grocery stores. So, we opened

what we called Welcome Central – it’s an outreach support. We provide transportation, then help people find the services they need. We provide some of them ourselves and coordinate with other people,” Perkins said.

Once that part was opened, it became apparent there was a need for extended services.

“So, we called churches back together and explained to them that in the first seven months we were open, we had talked to 58 people who were homeless,” Perkins said.

In January 2014, Welcome Central was opened and by December 2014, the night shelter was open. Ultimately, building a new shelter became the path forward.

“We looked at a lot of buildings, but nothing worked. So, we finally just decided we needed to build a building. It was an incredible experience,” Perkins said. “The volunteer effort was large, with the general contractor



Jennifer Christensen, executive director for Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope, spoke recently with staff as they prepared for a noon meal at the shelter.

himself – and many others donating services. The building was built for about \$600,000 – and is insured for \$1 million.”

The building was up and running in January 2018.

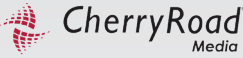
Christensen became the executive director in June 2025. The previous director, Myranda Agnew,

served from 2021 until last year.

Those who wish to help at the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope with donations or by volunteering, can visit lvcommunityofhope.org

To sign up for the Coldest Night of the Year fundraising walk, go to www.CNOY.com

“Anybody that signs up as a team captain or raises \$150 or more gets a cool little Coldest Night of the Year beanie,” Christensen said. “It’s just a fun night to connect and bring awareness – and just being a part of the community that’s doing good, solving problems and providing support.”

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