



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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SUGGESTIONS FOR STAYING SAFE DURING THE COLD WINTER MONTHS

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CARM'S COMMENTS: Carmen Schacht

The theme for this month's Chit Chat is winter safety and how people with disabilities deal with winter weather. It is winter, whether it seems like it or not. I for one like winters like this. While chatting with a friend with a disability a while back, I asked him how he dealt with winter. This person is a bilateral amputee. He prefers to walk rather than use his wheelchair even though he says it is hard to know if his feet are firmly planted. Another person told me once that he prefers to use his manual chair in the winter because his electric one gets stuck easily.

Someone else I spoke with had a sledding accident a few years ago. At that time he froze one of his hands and finds that he has to be very cautious when it is cold so that his hand doesn't get too cold. My husband has had heart surgeries and he finds that his hands are always cold and he has to come in quite often just to warm his hands. When I

was walking more than I do now, my biggest fear was falling. Now I am concerned with whether my scooter is going to get stuck or not. The thing that bothers me most with my van is wind and ice. If the wind gets over 30 MPH, I don't like to be out in it because vans are hard to handle. I am thankful to have a cell phone in case of emergencies. Please be sure to take every safety precaution you can in dealing with winter weather and your personal disability. Only a couple more months and it will be more like spring.

A reminder to all of you that the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is available until April 15. I realize that the weather has been warmer this year and the prices of fuel are lower. However, this is a program to assist people who need a little extra help so they can stay warm. Income/eligibility guidelines are available on the LIHEAP website at www.state.ia.us/government/dhr/caa/LIHEAP.html. You can apply across the state at the Community Action Agencies. The average amount people are receiving one time during the season is \$220, which is paid to your heat supplier. (CS)

CONSUMER SOLUTIONS

Jon Jeffers, an AgrAbility consumer from Bonaparte, is in the process of having a heated ramp constructed. The ramp, made of

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concrete, is insulated and has six coils. Each coil will have its own pump and the water will be heated by a boiler. Jon says that he looks forward to being able to wheel his chair down the ramp on a snowy day without having to worry about piles of snow and patches of ice.

Last year AgrAbility consumer Brian Tigges experienced his first winter since his leg was amputated below the knee. He discovered that walking over snow banks is very difficult with a prosthetic foot. According to Brian, “you take some things for granted – you don’t realize how much your ankle helps your leg move until you have a prosthesis.” He says that he actually ended up rolling over snow banks because he was unable to pull his leg up high enough to clear them. Brian’s solution this year will be to wear snowshoes once there is a lot of snow on the ground. He says that several people have told him that snowshoes are very helpful for people with prosthetic legs.

AgrAbility helped consumer Ed Gutcher find warm and safe work mittens after he lost the fingers on one hand while working with a table saw. Ed uses a pair of snowmobile mittens made of a heavy nylon fabric that is abrasion-resistant and waterproof. They have a rubber palm and thumb to make tools and objects easier to grasp. The mitten has a large opening to make it easy to slip on, and a drawstring at the top to keep out breezes. For safety it is important that drawstrings are tucked away so that they can’t dangle to get caught in machinery or doors. Mittens that are long enough to be tucked into a sleeve meet this safety requirement and also provide extra warmth.

STAY ACTIVE THIS WINTER BY STAYING SAFE

Severe winter weather makes safety a priority for everyone, particularly for those

with physical disabilities. People who are able to travel the sidewalks alone during the summer can find it impossible to get their wheelchairs through the snow unassisted in the winter. Canes may slip on the ice. Walkers may become unsteady when placed on unevenly packed snow. The strength of a person’s grip can be reduced in the cold, making it harder to hold onto these aids.

Whenever possible, ask someone for assistance if you need to go outdoors in the snow and cold. A helping hand can prevent a painful fall. Stock up on groceries so that you will need to make fewer trips to the store and will be prepared if a severe storm hits. If you use a cane or other walking device, add an ice tip to the bottom to prevent it from slipping. Be sure to dress warmly and always let someone know if you’re going outside. Remember that alcohol consumption, chronic illness, and certain medications can decrease body temperature.

Cold winter temperatures can place children and adults at risk of getting frostbite or hypothermia. ISU Extension publication PM-1563i (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1563I.pdf>) offers the following information about overexposure to the cold:

What to watch for:

- signs of hypothermia, including confusion, clumsiness, drowsiness, slurred speech, shallow breathing, and uncontrollable shivering
- signs of frostbite, including numbness in the extremities
- winter storm warnings; and
- a low wind chill temperature.

What to do:

- avoid outdoor work during winter storms and severe cold.
- dress in layers. Cotton socks worn under two pairs of wool socks and heavy,

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properly fitting boots can keep feet warm.

- cover all exposed areas, including neck, face, fingers, and wrists.

Be safe and stay warm! (BR)

RESOURCES:

ISU Extension offers many useful publications relating to our cold Iowa winters. Is there a baby in your family? *Keeping Babies Warm in Winter* (PM-1655) or <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1655.pdf> provides tips on how to keep your infant warm and safe during the winter. Learn about the advantages and disadvantages of various coat fabrics in *Buying a Warm Coat* (NCR 131) or <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/NCR131.pdf>. These publications and others can also be obtained by contacting your county extension office.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

*****Mark your calendar***** The statewide AgrAbility conference will be held on Saturday, April 13th. All AgrAbility consumers and their families are invited to attend. The main focus of this year's meeting will be on the unique needs of care givers and care receivers. Breakout sessions will be offered for the two groups. Look for more information in the mail in February.

Individuals with speech or hearing impairments can now access text telephone service in Iowa through a simplified system. By dialing 711, callers will be automatically connected to Iowa Relay, the state's text telephone service. This service is offered nationwide and those traveling to other states will only have to remember one access number.

Calling all artists! VSA arts of Iowa is awarding a \$500 scholarship for an individual age 15 or older with a disability to take classes to further his/her skill in his/her art form. Applications must be postmarked no later than February 15. For more information contact Stephanie Dunker at (515) 281-3179.

Crop producers and agribusiness personnel are invited to the ISU Extension Crop Advantage Series. The series will be offered at various sites across the state in January and February. It will focus on how 2001 crop problems will influence pest management and other decisions in 2002, as well as the latest integrated crop management technology. If you have questions or wish to register for any of these conferences, please contact your county Extension office for more details.

Upcoming events:

January 24-25 - Iowa Fruit & Vegetable Growers Convention and Trade Show, Best Western, Marshalltown (for info call 515-465-5992)

January 30-February 1 – Iowa Nursery & Landscape Convention, Polk County Convention Complex, Des Moines (for info call 515-242-2400)

AGRABILITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Southeast Iowa AgrAbility Friends and Family

March 9, 1:00 p.m.

Contact Ron Bradley (563-724-3918) or Dennis Byrnes (563-946-3905) for more information.

Freewheeler's AgrAbility Friends and Family

April 6, 1:00 p.m., New Hampton Library
Contact Carmen Schacht for more information: (563-547-2932).

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Find the AgrAbility Friends and Family leader nearest you and give him/her a call if you would like to offer your support or share informally with other farm families with disabilities: Call Carmen Schacht, 563-547-2932, or access:
www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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