

Winter 2015

Teaching Tips

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Is teaching Extension clientele any different in the winter months than during other seasons of the year? Some may say “no,” while others may say “yes;” or “it may depend on the program type.” Do Extension professionals have to be cognizant of more things (i.e. potential crises) during the winter? Yes, possibly so.

In regards to the 4-H program area, in-school and after school 4-H programs probably do not change a great deal nor have a large decrease in participants due to the winter weather (except during school closures when programs get cancelled). 4-H Agents need to tune in to the local school closings to be aware of when schools may be closed when programs have been planned. When approaching an evening club and/or council meeting, 4-H Agents and office staff need to be aware of the weather to ensure the safety of clientele being able to drive to and from the meeting locations during extreme weather situations. 4-H Agents must also monitor weather conditions during the winter months and think about members with livestock and dogs and communicate with them on how to prepare their animals for extreme cold weather conditions.

Family and Consumer Science (FCS) agents and staff must also be aware of school closures and weather during the day and evening when extreme weather is occurring or is forecasted, especially when evening meetings are to occur. We must think about the safety of our clientele, youth to adults, and our own when extreme weather conditions are occurring or are about to occur.

Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) and Horticulture Agents may be tracking the local weather more often simply because weather is of utter importance to their clientele. Livestock, crop farms, pets, nurseries and home garden owners depend on accurate weather information to keep their livelihoods and homes/yards healthy, productive and prepared for an excellent start to the next growing season. Winter is also a dangerous time with extreme weather conditions occurring that require preparation. Community and farm clientele will often call upon and rely on ANR and Horticulture Agents for expertise on how to prepare livestock, farms, crops, etc. ANR and Horticulture Agents must also keep their eye on weather during the day and evening times for meetings, home/farm visits, etc.

A great way for all Extension professionals, Agents, county staff and State Specialists, to stay aware of their local weather is to become familiar with and utilize the expert weather information on the UK Ag Weather Center website <http://weather.uky.edu/index.php>. You may access the weather information provided by the CAFE Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering Department Meteorologists anytime, anywhere on any device, including mobile devices (see their mobile site). You may utilize this information and also share this website with your clientele. There is a wealth of information that may help you and your clientele be knowledgeable about current and upcoming weather and even see extreme weather warnings for different parts of the state, as posted.

There are some key things to remember when planning and preparing for Extension programs during the winter months. First of all, as I mentioned...*check the weather*. Secondly, if there is extreme weather occurring or approaching...*maintain your relationships with clientele by continuing communication* via email, texts, Facebook, Twitter and/or other social media you may use. You should also use the basics, telephone communication, at times since not everyone uses the World Wide Web and text applications. Keep your clientele informed about any meeting or program cancellations. Local TV stations and radio stations, where applicable, may also be of help in disseminating information about cancellations to the greater public when you have cancelled events. When Extension programs are cancelled, especially those to be held in school or after school, think about ways you may still engage your clientele using social media or the Internet. Oftentimes, youth (and sometimes their parents or other adults) may also be snowed in at home when there are several inches or feet of snow on the ground! *Try to be innovative and find ways to engage your audience* who may have been looking forward to your program that day. The use of technology today allows us to interact more easily than ever! One innovative way a 4-H Agent, Eric Comley, in Garrard County involved youth and adults during extreme weather days/school closures was to create photography contests. Contact Eric for all the details on how he ran contests on Facebook during school snow days. He shared this great idea during the 4-H In-Service Training Series in early December 2015.

Lastly, if one of your programs has to be cancelled or changed during the winter months due to extreme weather conditions, *always plan to reschedule your programs where possible and inform those who were signed up and/or are members of the group of the new date(s) and time(s)*. Don't let the cold, snowy/icy weather put a damper on your day! Find new ways to engage with clientele where possible and keep in contact with your clientele. Watch the weather and be prepared...because you never know when the weather will change!