

## **Speech by Minister Kehoe for launch of the ‘Be Winter-Ready’ 2016 – 2017 Campaign**

As Chair of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, I am delighted to be here today alongside my Ministerial colleagues to launch the 2016/17 ‘Be Winter-Ready’ campaign. I would like to welcome all of the relevant Government Departments and Agencies present, along with representatives of the various transport operators and other key agencies who have come together to support today’s campaign launch.

The ‘Be Winter-Ready’ campaign is intended to give the public advice on the particular challenges that the winter period can present. The campaign highlights the ‘Whole of Government’ approach being taken to winter preparations and informs the public of what is being done in this area and where they can source information. This is now an established annual event impacting the whole of the public service. The launch of the ‘Be Winter-Ready’ campaign marks the start of what can be a very demanding time for many people, including the emergency services. It also gives us an opportunity to take stock and reflect on what we have achieved collectively. My Ministerial colleagues will be informing you on the outcome of very significant work that has been done with regard to flooding both within their Departments and cross departmentally.

Appropriately, this year’s ‘Be Winter-Ready’ campaign is focused on Flooding and Safe Driving. The Office of Emergency Planning, in collaboration with their colleagues in the OPW and Road Safety Authority, have designed and produced a leaflet on each. These leaflets are available on the [winterready.ie](http://winterready.ie) website.

As you are aware we have just concluded a meeting of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, which was dedicated to winter-preparedness. We have received a comprehensive briefing from all relevant Government Departments and Agencies. The role of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning is to support coordination across Government services in preparing for emergencies. My Ministerial colleagues and I are jointly launching this campaign to emphasise this coordinated approach that has been put in place over recent years. We are committed to continuing this approach to building our National resilience during the winter in general but especially during severe weather events that may occur. This provides an opportunity for all of the relevant Government Departments and Agencies, along

with transport operators, utilities and other services, to come together. This provides a forum for advice and information on our collective preparedness for the winter months ahead and how the public can avail of this information.

In preparing for this year's launch, I would like to acknowledge the work of individuals, community groups and the voluntary emergency services for the essential assistance they provide during the winter and particularly during periods of severe weather, especially to the vulnerable in our communities. Having well prepared plans and preparations in place locally and within our communities to ensure our resilience in such circumstances remains a key factor for coping with the adverse impacts from severe weather. Community resilience is vitally important in dealing with severe weather and other major emergencies. The front line emergency services rely heavily upon the community spirit that exists across Ireland to assist them in their work and this is greatly appreciated.

There is no doubt that severe weather tests our resources and our ability to carry on normal activities. This was very clearly demonstrated with the severe flooding last winter. However, I believe that, by being prepared and working together at local, regional and national levels, we all become more resilient and minimise the disruption to our lives by such events.

One of the most notable aspects of last winter's severe weather was its longevity, with flooding persisting in some areas into April 2016 and indeed longer in some areas. The fact that the National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG) was convened in advance of Storm Desmond, and met over thirty times, ensured a speedy response when flooding occurred.

The 'Be Winter-Ready' website and the 'Be Winter-Ready' booklet have been significantly improved. They, together with the links to other public service websites, bring all of the relevant information together in a coordinated manner. I would, therefore, ask you all to take some time to explore these sites and to read the booklet.

The Office of Emergency Planning will be also be regularly tweeting during the winter period to augment the 'Be Winter Ready' website and the advice being issued during particularly severe weather events. The twitter account can be followed on **@emergencyIE** and the public are being encouraged to join in the conversation at **#bewinterready**.

Today, I am asking for the assistance of the media in helping to get the campaign message to the public. The main message remains a simple one, be prepared, stay safe, know where to find help if you need it and be prepared to help others if you can.

In other words 'Be Winter-Ready'.

Go raibh maith agat.

**Paul Kehoe T.D.**

**Chairman of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning  
and Minister with Responsibility for Defence**