

Winter Driving Review

Fair or foul weather, no matter your geographical region, driving presents hazards. The winter months in particular introduce drivers to conditions that are far different from those they face during the summer.

Nine tips to help you stay on the road safely...

- 1. See and be seen.** Clean off all snow, ice and frost from your windshield, other windows, outside mirrors, lights and reflectors. Make sure your vehicle is equipped with good wiper blades and that wiper arms are exerting enough pressure on the blades to ensure a clean sweep. If moisture or ice builds up on the inside or outside of your windshield, stop and clean it off. Snow left on your hood or roof can blow back onto both your own car and others, temporarily blinding you and/or other drivers.
- 2. Tires.** Tires with good, deep treads are essential for good cornering and handling on slippery roads. Check the air pressure frequently to maintain the manufacturer's recommended pressure.
- 3. Get the feel of the road.** Occasionally try your brakes or gently depress your accelerator while driving. When you have found out just how slippery the road is, adjust your speed accordingly. Rising temperatures greatly increase the slipperiness of ice and snow. Road conditions are most hazardous around 32°F.
- 4. Stretch your "following" distance.** Knowing that winter surfaces increase stopping distance three to twelve times, the smart driver increases their normal dry road following distance. Trucks require a longer stopping distance on slippery roads than passenger cars. Don't tailgate.
- 5. Brake before curves.** All vehicles are particularly sensitive to over-powering, over-steering, and over-braking on curves. Unseen hazards around the bend may require an evasive action, so turn your steering wheel slowly and smoothly, keep a constant speed in the turn, and squeeze your brakes carefully if it is necessary to slow down or stop.
- 6. Squeeze your brakes.** The key to stopping under control on slippery surfaces is to avoid locking the wheels. A rapid pumping of brakes will provide short intervals of braking and of rolling wheels alternately and will enable you to maintain steering control while stopping.
- 7. Use proper lights.** Never drive with parking lights instead of headlights in winter's early dusk or poor visibility. Parking lights can cause an oncoming driver to think you are farther away than you really are. Keep headlights clean; dirty ones can greatly reduce your own viewing distance at night.
- 8. Freezing road surfaces.** When the temperature nears freezing, you may encounter water on a roadway but ice on a bridge. That's because bridge temperatures are five to six degrees colder than the rest of the road.
- 9. Caution. Take it easy.** Do everything—accelerating, braking and steering—slowly.

Defensive Driving in Winter Weather Conditions

The Winter driving season can be one of the most dreaded times of the year. Snow, ice and heavy rain can wreak havoc on the roads and on your nerves when behind the wheel. The silver lining to this is that driving during the winter season can be done safely when you have the knowledge of how to handle these weather-related conditions.

Prior to operating a vehicle during the winter months, prepare for the drive ahead by listening to the radio and/or watching the local news to get the latest weather forecast. Some of the winter weather forecast terms that you need to be familiar with include the following:

Winter Storm Watch: Adverse winter weather, such as heavy snow or the possibility of a blizzard is expected within the next two days, but the exact timing, location or occurrence of the storm is still uncertain.

Winter Storm Warning: Hazardous winter weather is likely. If it is not already occurring, it is expected to occur within 6 to 12 hours. Travel conditions during this time will be hazardous, if not impossible. A Winter Storm Watch usually precedes a warning, giving you ample time to be ready for the storm by the time the warning is issued.

Blizzard Warning: The most dangerous of all winter weather, a blizzard, will occur in your area. A combination of winds blowing at 35 mph or greater and significant snow and/or blowing snow with visibilities less than 1/4 mile for three or more hours is expected in the warned area. Blinding snow or white-out conditions, deep snow drifts and life threatening wind chill temperatures will occur.

Heavy Snow Warning: A snowfall totaling 6 inches or more will fall within 12 hours with 8 inches or more falling within 24 hours.

Snow Advisory: A snowfall totaling 3 to 5 inches occurring within 12 hours.



Winter Weather Advisory: Weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous.

Remember that safely navigating the roads takes longer when they are snow packed and ice covered. Don't assume that your vehicle can handle all road conditions. Even four-wheel and front-wheel drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads. Give yourself plenty of time to maneuver your vehicle by driving slowly and providing yourself with a cushion of safety around your vehicle. In ideal weather conditions, the recommended following distance is three to four seconds. However, on roads covered with snow and/or ice, this following distance should be increased to eight to ten seconds, possibly more, depending on the weather conditions.

Giving yourself an increased margin of safety provides you with a longer distance between your vehicle and those in front and in back of you, giving you more time to stop the vehicle safely. In addition, do not use the cruise control or overdrive feature on your vehicle when the roads are snow packed or icy.

Another important tip to remember when driving on snowy/icy roads is to accelerate and decelerate the vehicle slowly. This helps to retain traction and avoid skidding. When applying the brakes, if the wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake pedal.

Increasing your visibility is also important to avoiding an accident. Turn your lights on so that other motorists can see your vehicle. Oftentimes salt and spray from the roadway will create a film on your windshield, headlights and taillights. Check these items during your pre-trip inspection and make sure they are clean.

When climbing hills that are snowy or icy, use your low gears to provide more traction. Don't "power up" hills. Applying extra power from the gas pedal on snow-covered/icy roads may cause your vehicle to lose traction, resulting in spinning the wheels. Try to get a little inertia going before you reach the hill and then let that inertia carry you to the top. As you reach the crest of the hill, reduce your speed and proceed down the hill as slowly as possible.

Bridges, overpasses and infrequently traveled roads can be especially treacherous in winter weather conditions because these structures often freeze first. Keep in mind that even when temperatures are above freezing, if the road conditions are wet, ice can be present in the shady areas of normal roadways and also on exposed roadways such as bridges.

As mentioned earlier, even if you are driving a heavy truck or have the four-wheel drive option engaged on your vehicle, don't assume that your vehicle can handle all road conditions. Snow packed/icy road conditions can pose trouble for any vehicle. If you are driving along and your rear wheels begin to skid, take the following action:

- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Steer in the direction you want the front wheels to go.
- If your rear wheels start sliding the opposite way as you recover, ease the steering wheel toward that side.
- If you have standard brakes, pump them gently.
- If you have anti-lock or ABS brakes, do not pump them. Apply steady pressure to the brakes by pressing down on the brake pedal. You will feel the brakes pulse and may hear an odd noise—this is normal.

If your front wheels begin to skid:

- Take your foot off the gas and shift to neutral, but don't try to steer immediately.
- As the wheels skid sideways, they will slow the vehicle and traction will return. As it does, steer in the direction you want to go. Then put the transmission in "drive" or release the clutch and accelerate gently.

If you get stuck in snow or ice:

- Do not spin your wheels, this will only dig your vehicle in deeper.
- Turn your wheels from side to side a few times to push the snow out of the way.
- Try rocking the vehicle out by lightly touching the gas and shifting from forward to reverse, and back again until the vehicle is free. However, check the vehicle owner's manual before taking this action as it can damage the transmission on some vehicles.
- If the vehicle is still not free, use a shovel and move the snow away from the wheels and the underside of the vehicle.
- Pour sand, kitty litter, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels to gain more traction.
- If none of these actions work, call for help and stay with the vehicle for safety and to keep warm. If you are waiting for help and the engine is running, open your window a little to reduce exposure to carbon monoxide.

In addition to driving safely in winter weather conditions, as a defensive driver, it is also important to keep the following safety tips in mind:

- Always wear your seatbelt.
- Avoid backing situations whenever possible. If you must back up the vehicle, do so immediately to reduce the chance of changes in the surrounding environment.

- When entering or exiting the vehicle, use the Three Point Contact Rule. Entering and exiting a vehicle is the number one cause of trip, slip, and fall accidents for drivers. The Three Point Contact Rule means that three of your four limbs are in contact with the vehicle at all times: two feet and one hand or two hands and one foot.
- Be aware of your surroundings when entering or exiting your vehicle. Watch out for slippery conditions such as rain and puddles, ice and snow, and uneven surfaces. This awareness will help to reduce trip, slip, and fall accidents.
- Do not rush or use excessive speed while driving. Rushing to get home a half hour earlier greatly increases your chances of being involved in an accident.
- Keep an eye out for aggressive drivers and maintain self control at all times.
- Provide a cushion of safety around your vehicle. The most important area to maintain a good cushion of safety is in front of your vehicle.