



## SAFE WINTER DRIVING

Winter conditions call for drivers to drive differently than they would in dry conditions. The key to driving in winter conditions is to take it slow – slower speed, acceleration, steering and braking.

Brakes should be used carefully. Brake early and correctly. The vehicle will need more time to stop in wintery conditions. If the vehicle has anti-lock brakes the driver should press the pedal down firmly and hold it there while readjusting the steering wheel. If the vehicle does not have anti-lock brakes gently pump the pedal and adjust the steering to avoid swerving.

Drivers should give themselves extra time to reach their destination. They put themselves and others at risk if they are driving too fast just to make it to their destination on time.

### Before Traveling in Wintery Conditions

The following tips will prepare the driver and the vehicle for winter driving. Safe drivers know the weather and they know the vehicle's limits.

- ▶ Plan your travel by selecting primary and alternate routes.
- ▶ Check the latest weather and traffic information before heading out.
- ▶ Clear snow and ice from the hood and roof of the vehicle and all windows and lights.
- ▶ Make sure the vehicle's brakes, windshield wipers, defroster, heater and exhaust are all in top working condition.
- ▶ Check the levels of the antifreeze and windshield wiper fluid.
- ▶ Check that the tires are properly inflated and that the tread is good.
- ▶ Keep the gas tank full.

Below is a list of items to keep in the vehicle during the winter season.

- ▶ Chains, if needed – making sure that they are the proper size for the tires. Carry extra links and a flashlight to make repairs if necessary.
- ▶ Extra clothing, blankets, water, and food in case the vehicle breaks down or travel is delayed due to the storm.
- ▶ Ice scraper or de-icer and brush.
- ▶ Jumper cables.
- ▶ A shovel to dig the vehicle out if it gets stuck.
- ▶ A bag of sand for traction.
- ▶ A map in case of a detour.
- ▶ Cell phone.



## Winter Driving Tips

It is important to drive more cautiously in winter conditions. Being in a hurry or not paying attention could cause the driver to lose control of the vehicle and injure themselves or others.

- ▶ Drive with the headlights on.
- ▶ Be more observant.
  - Watch for ice patches on bridges and overpasses.
  - Visibility can be limited in these conditions, watch for other vehicles, and flashing lights.
  - Look farther ahead in traffic. Watch for problems other drivers may be having up ahead to give you extra time to react.
- ▶ Allow extra room between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you.
- ▶ Avoid abrupt actions while steering, braking or accelerating.
- ▶ Don't cut in front of trucks – heavier vehicles take longer to stop.
- ▶ Don't get overconfident in your 4x4 vehicle.
  - These vehicles may get going quicker and through heavy snow better than others, but they won't stop faster and can lose traction as quickly as a two-wheel drive vehicle.
- ▶ Don't use cruise control.
  - Touching the brakes to stop when sliding on ice will deactivate the cruise control and could cause you to lose control of the vehicle.
- ▶ If the road or storm becomes too dangerous seek refuge or pull off safely to the side of the road.

## Safety around Snowplows

When approaching snowplows the driver should stay at least 200 feet behind the vehicle. Often times the road behind the plow will be safer than in front of the plow. If you plan to pass the snow plow, always pass on the left and avoid making abrupt lane changes. The passing lane might not have been cleared yet or there could be a snow ridge between the two lanes. On multi-lane roads always look for snowplows working in either lane.

## What to Do If You're Stranded While Driving

Stay in your vehicle. Walking in a storm can be very dangerous. If you don't know the area you could lose your way, become exhausted, collapse, or risk frostbite or hypothermia. Your vehicle will provide you good protection from harsh winds and wet weather.

Avoid overexertion. Do not attempt to push the vehicle or shovel the snow around the vehicle if it takes too much effort. Overexerting yourself could lead to heart attack or many other injuries that you may not be able to treat right away. Don't work hard enough where you begin to sweat. Wet clothing loses its insulation quality and makes you more susceptible to hypothermia.

Allow fresh air into the vehicle. It is better to be cold and awake than to be warm and slip into unconsciousness. Either keep the engine off or run it and the heater in short intervals. Wet or wind-driven snow can plug the vehicle's exhaust system allowing deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter the vehicle. Keeping a window cracked will allow fresh air to circulate through the vehicle. Keep snow off of the radiator to prevent the engine from overheating.

Keep your blood circulating. Loosen tight clothing and change your position frequently. Move your arms and legs, rub your hands together, and occasionally rub your feet to keep blood circulating.



## Effects of Cold Weather

Should drivers become stranded it is important that they be prepared with the correct personal protective equipment to protect themselves against the cold weather. This includes clothing such as hats, snow boots and gloves or mittens. Mittens are more effective at keeping the hands warm because they keep the fingers close together. To stay warm and avoid sweating the driver should be dressed in layers of loose fitting, light-weight clothing made of synthetic or wool fabrics rather than cotton, which retains water and conducts heat away from the body. The outside layer should be made of a water-repellent fabric to keep the driver dry.

If possible it is best to stay in the vehicle or to avoid prolonged exposure to the elements. Alcohol and illegal substances should also be avoided. Alcohol only makes you feel warm. In reality, it increases your heat loss by increasing the blood flow to your extremities.

It doesn't take long for cold weather to affect the human body. Exposed skin can freeze within one minute at temperatures below -25 degrees Fahrenheit.

Frostbite affects mainly the fingers and toes. Redness and burning sensations are indications that frostbite will occur. If the area goes numb frostbite has already set in. To treat frostbite hold the affected body part tightly against warm skin or another part of the body. After the body part is completely warmed keep the area covered to try and keep it from refreezing. Once a body part has been frostbitten it is more susceptible to frostbite again, even in milder conditions.

If no treatment is given to frostbite the skin darkens and blisters. Gangrene could set in and in extreme cases amputation may even be necessary.

Diabetes can also lead to frostbite. Diabetics should be more cautious in cold weather conditions.

Hypothermia is the rapid loss of body temperature. This occurs when the body is exposed to the cold for prolonged periods of time. Under these conditions the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. The following are symptoms of hypothermia:

- ▶ Uncontrollable shivering
- ▶ Slow or slurred speech
- ▶ Memory lapses
- ▶ Incoherence
- ▶ Frequent Stumbling
- ▶ Drowsiness
- ▶ Exhaustion

If these symptoms are present it is imperative that every effort is made to get warm. Hypothermia can be avoided by staying dry or removing wet clothing. Stay awake and alert. Failure to keep warm could result in organ failure or death.